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Statement

by

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during the

57th Session of the United Nations
Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

New York
7 March 2013

**Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a privilege to be participating in this important meeting. We are confident that under your able leadership this Commission would be able to produce tangible results that help promote the cause of Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. We would also like to express our appreciation for UN Women, which under the able leadership of Madam Bachelet, has contributed significantly towards desired goals.

2 We are all aware that this year's priority theme is fundamentally important for the well being of women across the geographical and developmental divide. We, therefore, look forward to a meaningful outcome and stand ready to play a constructive role in this regard.

Madam Chairperson,

3. Our national vision for women empowerment is guided by the words of our founding father, the Quaid-e-Azam, who said that "no nation could ever be worthy of its existence that could not take its women along with the men and no struggle could ever succeed without women participating side by side with men.

4. Pakistan's Constitution guarantees full participation of women in all spheres of national life. The Government of Pakistan has taken various steps to promote and protect their political, economic, social and cultural rights. Substantial steps have been taken to eliminate different forms of discrimination against women. Today, Pakistani women proudly participate in all fields of life from agriculture to industry, business to armed forces and from legislation to policy making.

5. Pakistan not only had the honour of having the first ever woman Prime Minister of the Muslim world but also has the distinction of having the first ever woman Speaker of the National Assembly in the entire Muslim World. Women, now, comprise about 20 per cent each of the two Houses of Parliament. An active Women Caucus of 90 women parliamentarians with representation beyond party lines works at the national level.

6. Pakistan's pursuit of women's empowerment agenda focuses primarily on: (a) reducing feminization of poverty; (b) promoting gender equality; (c) ending violence against women; and (d) introducing necessary legislation to protect and empower women. Our National Plan of Action contains strategies to improve participatory systems of accountability between government institutions and civil society; reinforcing provisions of ending Violence against Women and Girls in post disaster settings; fostering the active engagement of men and boys; improving comprehensive support services for victims of Violence against Women and Girls, particularly single, disabled, minority and indigent women; enhancing effective measures to address trafficking of women and providing access to reproductive health.

7. Our commitment to addressing women issues is evident from a range of legislative and administrative measures in particular the recent legislations against acid crimes, anti-women customary practices and harassment of women at the workplace. In 2012 Parliament passed National Commission on the Status of Women Bill providing for its complete financial and administrative autonomy and as I speak the notification constituting this Commission is being issued. The Commission is a national watchdog body to review, monitor and propose laws, policies and measures for protection and promotion of women's rights as equal citizens. Government is also playing a key role in ending violence against children through the South

Asian initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), which is currently focusing on issues pertaining to early marriages of girls.

Madam Chairperson,

8. Economic empowerment projects are part of the government's effort to create income-generating activities for marginalized women. The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), the largest ever program of social protection providing direct financial support to the women of poor households, is the bedrock of such initiatives. The programme's effectiveness and pioneering drive have been acknowledged internationally. The BISP also provides for imparting skills to enhance employability, health and insurance cover, access to education, and interest-free loans for women entrepreneurs. Seven million poor households across the country would benefit from this Programme. Under another initiative, the government has distributed land to landless farmers wherein it is mandatory to transfer land title to women alone.

Madam Chairperson,

9. Despite these efforts, gender inequality remains a big challenge to socio-economic development in Pakistan. Rural women engage in agriculture, livestock management and domestic chores as unpaid and unregistered workers. Female literacy rate is low and further lower in rural areas. Low literacy rates combined with gender stereotypes continue to result in instances of discrimination and violence against women. While the despicable attack on Malala Yousafzai shook the conscience of the world, it also showed the resilience of Pakistani society to such forces of darkness and despotism. To honour this courageous daughter of Pakistan's struggle for the right to education for all girls in Pakistan, the Government has declared November 10th as Malala Day. 2013 has also been declared the Year of the Girl Child.

10. In the face of such challenges, Pakistan is guided by the words of its former Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto who stated that a woman who cannot plan her life, family or a career is fundamentally not free. We are, therefore, committed to changing the plight of women in Pakistan by harnessing their potential to the gigantic task of nation building. We shall persist in our efforts to comprehensively defeat the forces of repression through effective measures both at policy and practical levels. We also look forward to the cooperation of our international partners in this regard. Together we must succeed.

Madam Chairperson,

11. The Beijing Platform remains the most comprehensive global policy framework for the full realization of women's rights. However, its 15-year review in 2010 demonstrated that despite progress in some areas, deficiencies remain with regard to all 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform. With only two years left to 2015, we are cognizant of the need to expedite efforts on the gender equality dimension of the MDGs to ensure their timely implementation. In this regard, sustained international cooperation and global partnerships are of vital importance.

12. Let me conclude by reiterating our firm conviction to ensure the end of violence against women and their empowerment in all situations, cultures and environments to achieve a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful world. Despite all challenges, the government of Pakistan and its civil society are resolute, committed and determined to achieve gender equality and eliminate violence against women.

I thank you.