



Permanent Mission of Eritrea
to the United Nations

Statement by Ms. Elsa Haile
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On Agenda item 62(a): Advancement of Women
At the Third Committee of the Sixty-Fourth Session of the General Assembly
13 October 2009, New York

Mr. Chairman,

Let me from the outset express my delegation's appreciation to you and the members of the Bureau for the excellent manner in which you are conducting the work of the Committee.

My delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on measures taken to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on Women.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the Sudan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

As we are making the necessary preparations at the United Nations to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2010, Eritrea is marking the 30th Anniversary of the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW). It was founded in 1979 during Eritrea's armed struggle for independence with the clear objective of achieving equality between women and men by promoting the creation of better political, economic, social and cultural opportunities for women as well as by advocating for fundamental change in the way women were treated and perceived in a deeply traditional Eritrean society.

The National Union of Eritrean Women, which enjoys the full support and cooperation of the Government of Eritrea, has been holding recently several workshops and discussions in several parts of the country to assess how wide and deep the changes it has been seeking are and what extra measures and tools it requires to help realize the advancement of women in the country.

Mr. Chairman,

No country can achieve sustainable development without recognizing the role and the rights of women. The road towards the full realization of the rights of women and girls is difficult and bumpy. The experience of many countries shows that for gender equality to materialize, it is not

enough to outlaw discriminatory laws and practices. It requires concerted efforts directed at addressing and correcting the root causes that give rise to gender imbalances.

With this in mind, the advancement of women is viewed as key component of my country's major policy issue. No legal or constitutional barrier stands on the way of women from using their full potential in any endeavour of their choosing. Women's equality with men is constitutionally guaranteed without any limitation to their full participation in all spheres of life. The commitments made in international fora, such as, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have all become part of the Eritrean national strategy that promote the needs and interests of women in different fields. The national strategies on gender, education, poverty reduction, health and food security, all respond to the needs of Eritrean women and girls in order to address the underlying conditions that have put half of the population of the country at disadvantage for various reasons.

As a result of these strategies there are greater awareness about women's rights and the need to empower women. Women in Eritrea, despite ominous societal and structural constraints, have been able to achieve certain progresses in several areas of concern. Whether it is access to education, primary health care and clean drinking water or rural micro-credit, or introduction of improved communication systems and electrification of rural areas, women have been known to benefit the most from such initiatives of the government.

The poor that are too poor to borrow money from commercial banks, have been benefiting from access to micro-credit programmes. The Government has established the Savings and Micro Credit Programme (SMCP) as a component of the Eritrea Community Development Fund (CDF). It is the largest micro-credit provider in the country, operating in all the six regions of the country. It has to date established several village banks with thousands of customers, of whom women are the majority.

Noting that sustainable development and elimination of poverty cannot be attained without full emancipation of women, the National Education Gender Policy and Strategy is being implemented to ensure the equal rights and opportunities to both sexes, and to narrow disparities at the primary and secondary levels. This Policy is aligned with the MDGs and strives to achieve universal primary education by 2015. The high participation of women in literacy programmes has also been very encouraging, in spite of the heavy responsibilities women continue to shoulder in the family and the community.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of Eritrea has been working hard to ensure the centrality of the health of women and children in all development plans at the national, regional, sub-regions, and community levels. Specific steps have been taken to ensure that women enjoy full access to quality health care and the necessary information to prevent and control the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

Reproductive health and reproductive rights still remain among the top priorities of the government. To reduce maternal mortality and address complications associated with child

birth, including fistula, the reproductive health programme has been at the forefront of the National Health Policy. As an outcome to the government's efforts, maternal mortality ratio has decreased to 450 live births; provision of basic essential obstetric care by health facilities increased from 28% to 69.9%; and hospitals that currently provide comprehensive essential obstetrics have reached 69.9%.

Mr. Chairman,

Violence against women comes in many forms, including the widespread of female genital mutilation (FGM) in many countries and regions. The FGM is a practice that affects a significant number of women in my country. The government has adopted a law that criminalizes the practice. Yet, my delegation is convinced that the legal step alone cannot be effective in reducing and ending the violence against women unless the measure is accompanied by public campaign and relevant programmes that would help accelerate the process of making the practice history.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation will continue its work in speeding up the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome document of the General Assembly special session on Women as well as the MDGs. Before I conclude, let me seize this opportunity to express my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his initiative to create new gender architecture with the view of having a coherent and efficient response to the issues of women at the global level. My delegation shall participate actively and constructively in realizing that goal.

Thank you!