



# SRI LANKA

Statement

by

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Agenda Item: 28  
Advancement of Women

at the  
65<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly  
Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee  
(Third Committee)

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(Please check against delivery)

Mr. Chairman,  
Distinguished Colleagues,

My delegation wishes to congratulate you on your election as the Chairman of this Committee and I wish to assure you and the Bureau of our fullest corporation in the work ahead of this Committee.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate Ms. Michelle Bachelet, on her appointment as the Under-Secretary General of the new UN entity, "UN Women" and thank her for sharing her vision and priorities for this new Unit. The Challenges ahead of this Unit are obviously enormous. However, for the common good of all women around the world, in fact half of humanity, we will embark on this journey with "UN Women", with conviction, faith and solidarity. You can be assured of the firm support and commitment of my country, which has pioneered many initiatives for the advancement of women over the years, in your endeavours in upholding and consolidating the rights of all women.

Also, I thank the Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA, the Special rapporteur on Violence against Women, and the Vice-Chair of CEDAW for their valuable engagement with the Committee. We note with appreciation the reports submitted by the Secretary-General under this Agenda Item.

Mr. Chairman,

This year marks an important landmark for us. It is the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of making the MDG commitments, which had set clear and overarching targets to ensure, inter alia, the welfare of women and children. It is also the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace and Security, that helped us to take progressive actions to facilitate gender parity and empower women. Similarly, the fifteen- year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, falls this year, and reminds us of the need to accelerate our efforts in bridging any gaps in the implementation of the goals set previously.

Mr. Chairman,

The reports submitted by UN Agencies, now comprising "UN Women", however reveal too many depressing facts on the status of women around the world. Although some progress has been made, amidst the challenges of climate change and the financial, food and economic crises, there are many aspects across the gender line that need immediate redress. In particular, in some areas, women who work in agriculture, face increased discrimination in access to land, water and other resources, including information. It is disturbing to learn that women continue to suffer the most abhorrent and persistent forms of violence, including

domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse. However, on the positive side, it is heartening to know that increased attention has been paid by countries to enact legal frameworks that promote and protect women's rights, including efforts to introduce policies and programmes enhancing gender parity. More women are gaining access to education, health and are being provided with social safety nets and opportunities for gainful economic activity.

Mr. Chairman,

As a country that adopted universal adult franchise in 1931, while still under the colonial yoke, Sri Lanka has facilitated the active participation of women in politics. As a result, fifty-Years ago, Sri Lanka made history as the first country in the world, to elect a woman Prime Minister. This year, Sri Lanka has been ranked 16<sup>th</sup> in the world for gender equality in the Global Gender Gap Index, way ahead of many developed countries. Despite the destruction caused by a 27 year conflict with one of the most ruthless terror outfit that the world has known, remarkable strides have been made on many fronts, including in the realization of or in near realization of the MDG targets concerning women and children.

Sri Lanka has integrated MDGs into the national development agenda and among its successes are the achievement of near universal gender parity in primary education, with the ratio of girls to boys in primary education reaching 99% in 2006. The literacy levels of 15-24 year olds has reached 95% across all sectors for both males and females. Access to health care was almost universal, and 98% of child births too place in hospitals. 113% of those attending universities are women. A staggering 69% of teachers are women.

Sri Lanka's commitment to fulfilling it's obligations under the CEDAW and other international instruments, has been sustained over the difficult and challenging times of maintaining national security and preserving law and order. All these have been possible due to increased sensitivity to women's issues and a firm government policy that seeks to empower women and address their needs. The enactment of the Citizenship (amendment) Act and the policy decision of the Government to amend the land Development Ordinance to, inter-alia, remove provisions discriminatory to women, demonstrate the commitment of the Government towards the well-being of the women. The Sri Lanka Women's Charter was adopted on the 3rd of March 1993, and a Bill to establish a National Commission of Women is currently being finalized. Also, the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs has identified the re-establishment of gender-focal points in Ministries as a priority

Mr. Chairman

Sri Lanka has taken proactive steps to curb violence against women through training, education and legal provisions. This includes sensitizing communities and religious groups to amend certain personal laws to prevent the early marriage of girls. The welfare of migrant workers and their families, especially the under-age children of migrant women, has been a priority area of concern for the Government. Laws have been enacted to facilitate the legal protection for children under 18 years. There are also 'safety net' programmes at community level for the children of migrant mothers. Exploitation, violent and derogatory treatment of migrant workers, especially women workers at receiving countries have been matters of serious concern to Sri Lanka and we strongly advocate the need to protect the rights of migrant women workers, including their right to decent work environment.

Mr. Chairman,

As a developing country evolving from a post-conflict situation, we are mindful of the challenges in front of us. The Mahinda-Chinthana, Ten-Year Development Framework offers hope and better prospects for rural women as it seeks to identify new growth areas to empower rural women, including enhancing infrastructure facilities and access to new and innovative technologies. The Government also has taken concerted efforts to redress issues of unemployment among women. In this context, the victims of the war, especially war widows and single mothers, are being provided assistance to rebuild their livelihoods through self-employments. In the North and the East, special self-employment programmes, with bilateral assistance from India, have been conducted to support affected women.

It is our firm conviction that development to be meaningful, benefits need to trickle down to all sectors without any discrimination. Empowering women would not only benefit the individuals concerned but an entire family and society as well.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to end this Statement by reiterating what my President, H.E Mahinda Rajapakse, said at the High-Level Plenary Meeting on MDGs two weeks ago. Quoting from the last sermon of Lord Buddha, he stated that "The moral worth of any Society can be assessed by a clear yard-stick - the quality of treatment meted out to women and children". Our deliberations today must be geared towards securing an equal world for all women, half of humanity!

I thank you.