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Statement

by

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**Hon'ble Member of Parliament
and Member of the Indian Delegation**

on

Agenda Item 27 (c): Advancement of Women at the Third Committee

66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York

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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset please allow me to thank the Secretary General for all his reports under this agenda item. It is a matter of great privilege to be speaking on the subject of advancement of women.

India greatly welcomes and commends the international efforts put in to establish UN women as we believe that it will provide a better and more effective platform to address issues of gender equality and empowerment of women in political and social spheres.

Mr. Chairman,

India has constantly strived to improve the conditions of vulnerable groups in our society such as women, children, aged and disabled persons. We recognize the positive ramifications of women's participatory role in our political, socio-economic and cultural spheres. India has particularly emphasized putting women on equal footing with men in all aspects. Our government's efforts are directed not only at adopting appropriate legislative and policy framework for upliftment of women but also at raising social awareness of the issue of gender equality and women empowerment to fight deep-rooted social prejudices and stereotypes.

The Constitution of India provides for positive discrimination in favour of women and directs the State to adopt measures to eliminate all forms of inequality between men and women. The Constitution also recognizes the responsibility of the State towards women and provides for "securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief" and "renounces practices derogatory to the dignity of women" under Article 42 and 51(A) respectively. The provision of equal pay for equal work for both men and women in Article 39(d) economically empowers women in creating a sustainable family environment.

Mr. Chairman,

Empowering women politically, economically, educationally and legally has been a major objective of the Government of India. The National Policy for Empowerment of Women seeks the creation of an environment conducive for the development of women, ending discrimination against women and providing equal access to health care, education, employment and social security.

Political empowerment is one of the most important component in the overall empowerment of women. We are proud of the fact that India gave women equal voting rights more than 60 years ago at the time of our independence. Under the 73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution, which provides for local and district level governance institutions, India had proffered 33% reservation for women in rural and urban local bodies. The experience of political participation of women in rural and district levels has been overwhelming and encouraging. This is one of the biggest mobilization of women in political environment in the world. The Parliament raised the percentage of women to 50% in local bodies in 2009. Currently, we have more than a million elected women representative in local bodies.

Presently, the Parliament is considering the Women's Reservation Bill which would give women 33% of seats in Parliament and State legislatures as well. Our President, Speaker of the Lower House of the Parliament, leader of the ruling party and Leader of the Opposition in the Lower House are all women from various backgrounds who represent their people and constituencies at national and state levels. Chief Ministers of four important provinces in India are also women. All this is reflective of our endeavors to advance the process of participation by women in the political sphere.

Mr. Chairman,

The Five-Year Plans formulated by the Planning Commission of India for economic development has recognized the importance of the role of women as agents of sustained socio economic growth and change by incorporating proposals on gender empowerment in the last few plans. The Tenth Five-Year Plan was formulated to

provide necessary access of basic services, information and resources to women. The Eleventh Five Year Plan implemented additional measures for gender equality and empowerment. Gender has been made a cross cutting theme in all the development plans. There is also a Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women to ensure that legislations passed by parliament are gender sensitive.

Mr. Chairman,

The provisional census for 2011 indicates a positive increase of 11.8 % in literacy rate amongst women. This has been made possible due to constant efforts of the Government in ensuring access to education by adopting innovative schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (or Education for all), Mid-Day Meals and the National Literacy Mission which have focused on educating women by providing incentives and free education for girls between 6-14 years of age.

Health is another vital component in empowering women and India has taken several measures to provide better medical and health care support to women and children. The National Rural Health Mission launched in 2005 provides healthcare to all villages, with particular focus on maternal and children's health programmes. Under these programmes, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) who are trained health volunteers and who provide a link between health centres and villages ensure easy access to universal immunization, care of the new born, improved nutrition levels and health care for women.

Mr. Chairman,

While Empowerment of Women is important, it is equally important to address the problem of exploitation and violence against women. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act enacted in 2005 has given women a powerful tool to fight violence within the family and encompasses violence in marital relations as well as parental / familial abuse. We have formulated the Indecent Representation of Women Act which prohibits all forms of indecent display of women.

We also have a comprehensive legislative and policy framework to address the problem of trafficking in women and girls. At the level of policy implementation, we have developed strategies which are holistic, participative and inclusive and are not restricted to direct intervention against trafficking only. Anti-Trafficking Nodal Cells have been set up both at the Central and the provincial levels. We are adopting a victim-centric approach to these issues. A comprehensive scheme for prevention of trafficking, rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration and repatriation of the victims of commercial sexual exploitation is already in existence. We have also been working tirelessly on trafficking amongst women in collaboration with SAARC countries to prohibit cross-border trafficking in South Asia.

We welcome the successful adoption of the United Nations Global Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons last year. This will provide another opportunity for the international community to recommit themselves to fight this crime in a more coordinated and cooperative manner.

Mr Chairman,

Gender equality and the empowerment of women remains the key focus area of social development and distributive justice globally. These are also an integral part of the realization of the Millenium Development Goals. Let me assure you that India is fully committed to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform of Action

Our first Prime Minister, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, once said "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women." It is for us to create a conducive environment to channel the tremendous energy and potential that women have by providing them equal opportunity in healthcare, education, social, economic and political spheres. We have done so in the past, and this goal of gender equality and empowerment remains one of our foremost priorities.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.
