



# SRI LANKA

Statement

by

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at the

**Third Committee of the  
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**Mr. Chairman,**

We thank the Secretary-General for his reports and recommendations on this agenda item. My delegation also commends the reports of UN-Women, the CEDAW Committee and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. The delegation of Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by Argentina on behalf of the G77 and China.

We join other delegations in expressing our gratitude to the late Dr. Wangari Mathai, an inspiring environmentalist and a women's rights activist. It is perhaps poetic that her passing away was followed by the Nobel Peace Prize for 2011 being awarded to three equally inspiring women activists for their non-violent struggle for championing women's rights and ensuring the safety of women.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Sri Lanka has, over the past six decades, meaningfully integrated women as equal partners in shaping the economic, political and social life of the country. The World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index 2010, ranked Sri Lanka 16 among the 20 highest ranking countries in "gender egalitarianism." Since 1948, Successive Governments have been seeking to ensure that laws in the statute books and rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution are actually translated into equality and justice for women in their everyday lives. Sri Lanka recognizes that civil and political rights are interlinked with social, cultural and economic rights and that these reinforce each other. Sri Lanka ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and acceded to the Optional Protocol in 2002. Sri Lanka's combined fifth to seventh periodic report (CEDAW/C/LKA/5-7) was considered at the forty-eight session of the Committee and observations on concluding observations have been submitted by Sri Lanka at the end of the forty-eight session of the Committee.

We have integrated the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) into the national development agenda. Sri Lanka is on track to reach most of the indicators. Some have been achieved already. Among the notable achievements are those relating to equitable primary education (the universal primary education net enrolment rate has reached 99 per cent in 2009 for both males and females. The proportion of students starting Grade 1 and reaching Grade 5 has increased to almost 100 per cent in 2006/07), child mortality (the current level is 9.7 infant deaths per 1,000 live births) and maternal mortality (the MMR is 39.3 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2009, are the lowest in South Asia), access to safe drinking water (nearly 85 per cent of households have sustainable access to improved drinking water in 2006/07) and literacy (with female adult literacy at 97% and male adult literacy at 98% in 2010). It is significant that there is no gender disparity in these achievements. In secondary and tertiary education, the proportion of girls to boys exceeds 100 per cent.

In the Post conflict phase, the State, has invested in an ambitious development programme in the former conflict affected areas focusing on infrastructure and livelihood development. Sri Lanka set up special Women's Protection Units with female Police officers and Women's Centres in the IDP camps and are continuing to provide counselling services in the North and the East. The Government has given special consideration to uplifting the social and economic status of war widows. Already bilateral assistance has been obtained to initiate a self employment programme for war widows in Batticaloa in collaboration with Self Employed

Women's Association (SEWA) based in India. The protection of war affected women and children is a priority for the Government and every effort is being made to ensure that their lives are returned to normalcy as soon as possible.

**Mr. Chairman,**

A core issue undermining the overall wellbeing of Sri Lanka's women continues to be addressed. The State has taken significant measures to protect women against domestic violence. The Government has been expanding the legal framework and improving the "infrastructure of justice" to create gender sensitive laws, set up institutional mechanisms and is seeking to bridge the implementation gaps to respond to the prevalence of domestic violence. Towards this end, the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act No. 34 of 2005 (PDVA) was enacted to strengthen the protection mechanisms. An action plan for the implementation of the PDVA has been formulated by the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs.

The National Action Plan for the protection of Human Rights launched this October includes among its eight significant thematic areas the rights of women and children. It contains a strong focus on violence against women, women and the criminal justice system, female migrant workers and trafficking in women and children.

Sri Lankan policy makers are aware that new laws will have no impact without capacity building and systems and structures to support implementation. The Institute of Judges Services and the Police Department of Sri Lanka have been conducting training and sensitization programmes for law enforcement officials. Adopting a multi-sectoral approach, training on prevention and management of gender based violence is also provided for Police Health Midwives and Primary Health Care Workers comprising the first health service providers to women and families. The Ministry of Health in partnership with non-government agencies have developed hospital-based centres to provide medical assistance to those requiring attention for injuries suffered before referral to legal and psychosocial support.

**Mr. Chairman,**

There is national recognition of the urgency to provide and strengthen support services for victims of violence. The absence of temporary shelters or safe houses is an implementation gap that is being addressed even though the Department of Probation and Child Care provides temporary housing to victims of child abuse.

Following the model of one-stop crisis centres pioneered by Women in Need in Sri Lanka (WIN), a significant local NGO, the National Committee on Women has developed guidelines for the management and operation of shelters and counseling centres for victims of violence. The Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs of Sri Lanka has undertaken to establish the first government-run women's shelter, conforming to these guidelines. It is in recognition of the committed efforts made by Sri Lanka that it is a 2010 grantee under the 14<sup>th</sup> Grant Cycle of the UN-Women Trust Fund to undertake a joint UN programme on prevention of and response to gender based violence in the country.

Women In Need (WIN) in Sri Lanka has been in the forefront of supporting survivors of violence by providing safe-houses for victims of domestic violence, access to crisis support, legal services and psycho-social counseling. WIN also educates the public and civic leaders and equally importantly mobilizes youth and men for the protection of women's right to lead

lives free of violence. We are heartened that Ms. Savithri Wijesekera, the Executive Director of WIN was recently awarded the 2011 Americans for UNFPA Award for the Health and Dignity of Women in New York City.

Among the dedicated legal service providers include the EMACE Foundation, a local NGO that provides free legal clinics in Colombo as well as does outreach to rural women, running a free 24-hour hotline, which fields on average 50 calls a month about property and inheritance rights.

Sri Lanka also appreciates the programme sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State and implemented by US based IREX that provides capacity building opportunities in the US for young Sri Lankan community leaders dedicated to prevention of domestic violence in the country.

Sri Lanka welcomes the support that UN Women extends to the formulation of regional gender equality agreements. In this regard it is pertinent to recall the 2010, ministerial meeting organized by the Government of Bangladesh and UN Women where SAARC countries adopted the Dhaka Declaration that has identified unsafe migration and human trafficking as remaining major challenges in the region.

**Mr. Chairman,**

In addition to the institutional framework at the macro level to address gender based violence, much needs to be accomplished at the level of the family and the community to address the socio-cultural causes of such violence. As the distinguished representative of Benin pointed out, violence at home perhaps may seep into community structures and violence at the societal level may perhaps permeate the family and community levels. These are the questions that researchers together with policy makers need to address. In this regard, Sri Lanka looks forward to the signature report on gender based violence in the CARICOM region called "Youth, Masculinities and Violence in CARICOM") to be shortly released by the CARICOM Secretariat.

In conclusion, while Sri Lanka can showcase impressive accomplishments in gender progress policy makers continue to be mindful of the gaps among certain disadvantaged and rural segments of the population resulting in inter-district and intra-district discrepancies with regard to poverty conditions, healthcare and education progress.

Sri Lanka is both conscious and circumspect that certain concerns in the area of women's rights need to be approached with sensitivity and in a manner that would be accepted by all communities. Changes in sensitive areas relating to specific communities will be effected as and when such changes are sought or initiated by the communities concerned. In this regard the Government has been consistent in engaging civil society activists, community leaders, local and international experts. This approach would continue to guide Government policy to address concerns in Personal Law reforms.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.