

Statement by Ms. Gail Farnvalo
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On Agenda Item 28, Advancement of Women
To the Third Committee
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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, let me congratulate you and other members of the Bureau on your election and assure you of my delegation's fullest cooperation during the course of this session.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements of the African Group and the Group of 77 and China, respectively. We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his reports outlining the successes and challenges in the global efforts to advance women's rights and we support the recommendations. We have benefitted tremendously from the informative and instructive presentations of the representatives of UN Women, the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and UNFPA. We thank them and join in the call for continued support to these entities which are in the forefront of reinforcing national initiatives.

Mr. Chairman,

The promotion of gender equality and women's advancement is now globally recognized as an important prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development. This is not just because it is morally right, but because it makes good economic sense, given the valuable contributions that women make to economic development. The Government of Liberia is committed to gender equality as a means of consolidating peace, reducing poverty, enhancing justice and promoting development and regularly, Liberia joins other member states in renewing commitments to this cause.

Progress has been made in advancing the rights and welfare of women, but there are still impeding challenges, taking prominence is the phenomenon of the perpetration of violence against women. Therefore, it is timely that this is a subject for discussion on this agenda.

Resolution 65/187 urges member states to intensify efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, by developing strategies and systematic approaches with key focus on strengthening national legal and policy frameworks.

Mr. Chairman,

The situation of war where rape was used as a weapon, created the imperative and urgency for Liberia to develop legislation and institutional frameworks that would alleviate the threats that women and girls faced during conflict and post conflict, ensuring their freedom from fear and creating a secure environment where all would flourish. For the past six years the rape law has been in effect carrying a staunch penalty of 10 years for the offense of non-consensual sexual intercourse. To address impunity and redress, Special Court E established in 2008 tries cases of sexual violence. Capacities in the ministries of Justice and Gender and Development were strengthened to provide effective avenues for prosecution of offenses and protection and support to women. H.E. President Ellen Johnson recently committed to expanding the deployment of specialized SGBV units to six counties and to complete full deployment to all 15 counties by 2014. Women and children protection units of the Liberian National Police are charged with the duty to investigate GBV cases. Training across the justice sector from the police to lawyers and judges has been conducted to assure efficient application of justice. A Domestic Violence Act is currently being developed to address a problem that is increasingly becoming pervasive.

2012 statistics on gender-based violence reflected alarmingly that statutory rape at a percentage of 49.2% accounted for the most offenses of violence against women, domestic violence was the second highest, with rape at 16%, sexual assault accounting for 8%, 4% for gang rape and 2% for other offenses. Regrettably, the data reflected only a slight decrease in the occurrence of rape in comparison to the previous year; however, improvement in the quality of statistics and the reporting sources is evident. The availability of services to survivors is creating an environment whereby women are becoming more comfortable in reporting offenses and being empowered to

seek assistance. This wide-spanning information aids in the formulation of more targeted interventions and is essential in preventing the perpetuation of violence.

Interventions and activities implemented under the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Management of Gender-Based Violence in Liberia are geared toward strengthening prevention mechanisms and addressing the specific needs of survivors, including women and girls, and people with disabilities who are vulnerable to gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse. A Comprehensive one-stop service approach has been developed for survivors; reporting and prosecution cases have been increased by 10 % thru referral case management; psychosocial centers and safe homes are operational in three counties and plans are underway for a gradual expansion to all counties. Economic empowerment programs for survivors to start up small businesses and their access to an endowment fund managed through a joint Government/UN Program on Gender-Based Violence, ensure that immediate needs of survivors are met and provide long-term protection needs of the survivors who are unable to care for themselves.

Mr. Chairman,

Leadership, prevention, awareness raising and advocacy on violence against women are at the highest level of government. Public pronouncements and condemnation of all forms of violence against women and especially of children, including children on the streets, have been made by the President. The President participates and launches campaigns country wide via the media and through public gatherings. Liberia partakes in the global annual 16 day public awareness campaign to highlight the urgency throughout the 15 counties of Liberia. The awareness raising and advocacy actions on violence against women also include year round radio and television programs, a study on causes of sexual violence pre and post conflict; a wide range of meetings with various stakeholders to include the involvement of traditional leaders. Gender-based violence awareness-raising materials are currently being incorporated into the life skill education curricula developed by the Ministry of Education. Men and men's network are being engaged in the prevention of violence against women. It is paramount that the energies and talents of men be employed in the global efforts on women's advancement.

Mr. Chairman,

More broadly, we are continuing to integrate women's concerns in all of the national policies. Our focus is to now gradually translate the various action plans to benefit women. A comprehensive survey is currently being conducted to harmonize the National Gender Policy with the Gender Base National Action Plan and UN Security Council 1325 Action Plan in order to enhance coherency and coordination in implementation. A sex-disaggregated baseline methodology framework has facilitated the attainment of data collection contributing to better service delivery and the overall goal of achieving gender equality.

The Ministry of Gender and Development with the support of multi-lateral and bi-lateral partners have undertaken initiatives to improve the livelihood of women in the informal sector, particularly women involved in cross-border trade and rural women, to increase women's access to financial services through micro loans and social cash transfers, improve education for women and girls, and to economically empower adolescent girls and young women through literacy and small business training.

The implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 maintains a high priority on the advancement agenda. Increasing women's participation and leadership role in all spheres of government remains a continuous process. The 1325 Secretariat with UN Women's support, mobilized women to increase their participation in the recent elections. Female aspirants were trained in campaigning techniques and given financial support.

Mr. Chairman,

The efforts of my Government to achieve gender equality and advance the wellbeing of women are not without challenges and setbacks. Interventions and implementation of programs are hampered by inadequate human resource capacity, financial resource and budgetary constraints, inefficient enforcement of policies and the lack of data and coordination. Nonetheless, the commitment and political will provide the impetus and persistence to succeed.

I thank you.