



SRI LANKA

Statement

by

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at the

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Mr. Chairman,

We thank the Secretary-General for his reports and recommendations on the 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 EU and China.

We join other delegations in expressing our tribute to the late Dr. Wangari Maathai, an inspiring environmentalist and a women's rights activist. Her demands for better living 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 decades, meaningfully integrated women's education 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 equality" in the world. Since 1978, successive governments have begun steps to ensure that laws in the statute books and rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution actually translate into equality and justice to all. Sri Lanka recognizes that civil and political rights are interlinked 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 commitment to gender equality and women's rights 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 (MDGs) into the national agenda. Sri Lanka is on track to reach most of the MDGs. Significant achievements have already been made. Among the notable achievements are: equitable tertiary education (the universal enrollment rate in tertiary education is 97.5 per cent in 2009 for both males and females. The proportion of students starting tertiary education has increased to almost 100 per cent in 2009/2010 from the current level of 97.5 per cent); low infant mortality (IMR of 10.5 per cent in 2009, the lowest in South Asia); access to safe drinking water (nearly 85 per cent of households have sustainable access to improved drinking water in 2009); and high literacy rates (with female adult literacy at 97% and male adult literacy at 98% in 2009). It is significant that there is no gender gap 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 600 Women's Empowerment Centres (WECs) in the North and the East. The Government has given special consideration to the needs of women's status of war widows. Already bilateral assistance has been obtained to start 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 every effort is being made to ensure that their lives are returned to normalcy as far as is possible.

Mr. Chairman

A core issue undermining the overall wellbeing of Sri Lanka's women continues to be addressing the issue of consistent 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 is seeking to strengthen implementation gaps to respond to the prevalence of domestic violence. Towards this end, the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (PDVA) of 2005 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 in October includes among its eight significant thematic areas the rights of women and children. It also has 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 Justice and Order Services and the Police Department of Sri Lanka have been conducting training and sensitization programmes for law enforcement officials. 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 of cases requiring attention for injuries suffered before referral to legal and psychosocial support.

Mr. Chairman

There is national recognition of the urgency to provide an immediate support to strengthen support victims of violence. The absence of temporary shelters or safe houses is a major problem. A 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's Development Initiatives for the management and operation of shelters and counselling centres for victims of violence. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has taken steps to establish the first government-run women's shelter in Colombo to meet this demand. It is in recognition of the committed efforts made by Sri Lanka that it was 2012 was selected under the 14th Grant Cycle of the UN Women Trust Fund to undertake a 10 month 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 service and social counselling. WIN also educates the public and 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 included 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 30 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 State Dept Educational provides capacity building opportunities in the US for programs of Sri Lanka community leaders dedicated to prevention of domestic violence in the country.

Sri Lanka welcomes the support that UN Women extends in the formulation of a regional gender equality agreement to be signed in the region, its endorsement at the 2010 ministerial meeting organized by the Government of Bangladesh and UN Women in Dhaka, which also 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. A clear distinction of representative of violence at the societal level may perhaps not be made as they are inter-linked. 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 "Gender Inequality, Inequities and Violence in CARICOM") to be shortly released by the CARICOM Secretariat.

In conclusion, while Sri Lanka can showcase impressive work in certain areas, certain disadvantaged and rural segments of the population resulting in inter-district and intra-district differences with regard to poverty conditions, healthcare and education progress.

Sri Lanka is with its various and numerous rural related concerns in the rights need to be approached with sensitivity and in a manner that respects all communities. Changes in service are essential to rural 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 national level. This approach of participatory to guide Government policy to address concerns in Personal Law reform forums.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.