



BRAZIL

**STATEMENT BY H. E. DILMA ROUSSEFF,
PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERATIVE REPUBLIC OF BRAZIL,
AT THE HIGH-LEVEL EVENT ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

New York, 19 September 2011

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Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate the countries and multilateral organizations that are promoting this High Level Event on Women's Political Participation. Brazil is proud to participate in this initiative.

In two days, I will be the first woman in the history of the United Nations to open the General Assembly's General Debate. I would like to share this honor with all of the women here today, especially with Under-Secretary-General Michelle Bachelet, the first South American woman ever to be elected President of her country.

I address you today not only as the President of Brazil, but as a citizen, a woman, a mother and a grandmother.

Brazil sees the establishment of UN-WOMEN as a step towards concerted action in favor of a group that is not a minority: it is half of humanity. The creation of UN-WOMEN demonstrates that gender equality, far from being a secondary issue, is today at the top of the international agenda.

Despite notable progress, gender inequality persists. Well into the 21st century, women are still the ones who suffer the most from extreme poverty, illiteracy, poor healthcare systems, conflicts and sexual violence. Women generally still receive lower wages than men for doing the same work. They are still underrepresented in key decision-making positions.

The global economic crisis and misguided responses to it may well aggravate this situation and intensify the feminization of poverty. Therefore, fighting both the consequences and the causes of the crisis is essential to ensure women's economic empowerment.

Today, I would like to share with you some of Brazil's experience and views of women's role in building their own autonomy and in promoting development, peace and security – processes that we consider interdependent.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Brazil is deeply committed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and to fully implementing the main international agreements on gender equality. Likewise, we

strongly support the ILO's Convention and Recommendation Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers.

In my country, much remains to be done in order to expand women's political participation. But the important thing is that we are making progress.

I was the first woman to be elected President of Brazil, 121 years after the Proclamation of the Republic and 78 years after women were enfranchised. Brazilian women are 52% of the voters, but only 10% of the lawmakers. I have striven to expand women's role in decision-making. Ten of our ministries are headed by women. I wish to highlight that the core positions in my government, in particular, are held by female ministers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Brazil created a ministerial-level Secretariat of Policies for Women, charged with mainstreaming a gender perspective into all public policies. Women contribute intensely to the Secretariat's work through their participation in the National Conference on Women's Policies. We will hold the third such conference this year.

Over the past few years, my country has developed sustainably, combining economic growth with distribution of wealth and environmental responsibility. I began my government by setting ourselves a challenge: to eradicate extreme poverty.

Women, who suffer so much from poverty, are themselves the main partners of the policies designed to overcome it. They are given priority in social programs, such as those that provide cash transfers or housing credit. This leads to better quality of life for their families. Within the family, it is the woman who receives and manages the benefits from social policies.

Women are also partners in sustainable development and in a necessary change in patterns of consumption. I count on you to promote major female participation in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, which Brazil will have the honor of hosting in 2012.

My dear sisters,

Another crucial element of our commitment to women and to their sexual and reproductive rights is the improvement of our healthcare system.

Given the persistence of high maternal mortality rates, I have made it a priority to guarantee mothers safe and humane care, from the moment the pregnancy is confirmed through the first two years of the baby's life.

Moreover, we have reduced teen pregnancy, widened the distribution of birth control and increased our efforts to prevent, diagnose and treat cervical and breast cancer, as well as to halt the march of AIDS among women.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Women have a particular stake in building a more peaceful and secure world. Those who conceive life do not accept that violence can be used to resolve disputes.

Therefore, we must actively engage ourselves in reforming global governance, in order to give the international community more representative and effective means of moving towards sustainable peace.

Armed conflict preys particularly on women and, increasingly, on children.

Yet women are also subject to violence in times of peace, often within their own homes.

To fight this scourge, Brazil has created Specialized Police Stations and a Women's Hotline, as well as establishing special legislation to prevent and punish violence against women - the internationally recognized "Maria da Penha Law".

I am convinced that a change of culture is also needed to put an end to the deplorable but persistent habit of blaming women for the violence to which they are subjected.

Dear friends,

Rejecting inequality is fully compatible with celebrating difference. To promote human rights is to fight discrimination, whether it is based on gender, ethnicity, physical condition, sexual orientation or religion. These are inseparable struggles.

In moments of great difficulty, we all seek strength and inspiration from the women who, throughout history, have resisted all forms of oppression.

I thank them for giving me the chance to stand here today and to tell all the girls and women of the world that with courage, tenacity and integrity, we can achieve our dreams.

Thank you very much.