

PERVASIVE, CONTINUED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ‘AN APPALLING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION;’ ELIMINATING SUCH VIOLENCE AT CORE OF WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT, THIRD COMMITTEE TOLD

UN-Women Deputy Chief: Mindsets, Stereotypes at Root of Violence Must Change; Vice Chair of Anti-Discrimination Committee, Population Fund Official Also Speak

The elimination of the persistent and continued violence against women throughout the world was a core element for achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment, the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) was told today, at the start of its three-day discussion on the advancement of women.

“Violence against women constitutes the most severe expression of discrimination and disempowerment of women and girls,” said Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships Bureau of UN-Women. “It is a threat to democracy, peace and security, an obstacle to sustainable development and an appalling human rights violation.”

In her opening remarks, Ms. Puri described the incident last week in which gunmen shot 14-year-old Malala Yousufzai of Pakistan while she was on a school bus, because she spoke out on girls’ rights to education and freedom from violence. That case shocked the world, but violence against women could be witnessed every day, she said.

“As many as 7 in 10 women around the world report having experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime,” she said, calling for creation of a “virtuous cycle” by changing mindsets and stereotypes at the root of violence, thus preventing the violence.

At the same time, she said, the Committee was also meeting at a time of great promise and opportunity for women and girls around the world, as more women were exercising leadership in politics and business than at any time in history. Last year the Committee adopted a landmark resolution on women and political participation, and the number of countries reaching the 30 per cent mark of women in parliament had risen from 27 to 33.

“We need to continuously push the envelope and increase the standards and norms of gender empowerment,” she said.

Nicole Ameline, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, said women were often the first victims of violence, conflicts and discrimination and — at the same time — the main drivers of a fair development.

Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Deputy Executive Director (Management), introduced the report on ending obstetric fistula, saying it was one of the most serious injuries of childbearing and was preventable, treatable and had been virtually eliminated in the industrialized world, but in the developing world millions of women and girls were affected and 50,000 to 100,000 new cases developed each year. The factors that led women and girls to develop the condition were the same that caused maternal mortality and morbidity – gender inequality, lack of human rights protection and lack of access to a continuum of healthcare throughout the life cycle.

She called on the international community to devote more funding to Millennium Goal 5 (maternal health), to eliminate obstetric fistula and guarantee universal access to reproductive health by 2015. “If we make the health and rights of women and girls a priority, we can make every pregnancy and childbirth safe,” she said, “and eliminate obstetric fistula everywhere.”

Throughout the day, delegates agreed a more coordinated and systematic approach was needed to eliminate violence against women, deploring that many women and girls around the world were still falling victim to numerous forms of discrimination and did not have equal opportunities to fulfil their potential.

Whether in public spheres or private homes, women’s health, education, economic empowerment and political participation would only thrive where women’s safety was guaranteed, the representative of Australia said.

The representative of China noted the concept of gender equality had found its way into Government decision-making and that had led to improved living conditions for women in various countries. At the same time, the global financial crisis had been felt primarily by women, she said, calling on Governments to take a comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming in political, economic and social development strategies, as her country had begun to do for the 653 million women within its own population.

The representative of Malawi, speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community, said she was glad to inform the Committee that, for the

first time in Malawi, there was a female Head of State and Government, President Joyce Banda, the second female president in Africa. "Let me also mention that women's representation in parliament is also increasing with each election," she said.

Similarly, the representative of Brazil said 2011 would be remembered as a landmark year, as it marked the first time his country had seen a woman take office as President. Yet, women were underrepresented in decision-making in all areas. While they comprised 52 per cent of all Brazilian voters, only 10 per cent of parliamentarians were women. The President had made women's participation in top decision-making levels a priority.

The European Union representative lamented that women represented less than 20 per cent of members in national parliaments, and even less among Government ministers, while they were underrepresented on lists of political candidates. Women and women's perspectives must be represented at all high-level international discussions on security, development, human rights and the environment, including in the post-2015 development process. "Studies confirm that women play an instrumental role in safeguarding scarce natural resources," he said.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Cameroon (on behalf of the African States), Malaysia (on behalf of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)), Guyana (on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)), Chile (on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), Egypt (on behalf of the Arab Group)), Liechtenstein, Venezuela, Philippines, United States, Switzerland, Malaysia, Netherlands, Lebanon, Nigeria, Norway, Djibouti, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russian Federation, Myanmar, Libya, Belarus, United Arab Emirates, Cuba, Morocco, Finland, Israel and Nicaragua.

The representatives of Japan and Republic of Korea spoke in exercise of the right of reply.

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) will reconvene at 10 a.m. Tuesday, 16 October, to continue its discussion of the advancement of women.

Background

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) met today to begin its consideration of the advancement of women.

For its discussion, the Committee had before it a number of reports, the first of which was the Secretary-General's report on Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (document [A/67/220](#)), detailing State measures and United Nations activities to address violence against women. The report recommends, among other things, more focus on the protection of victims/survivors, and services provision to reinforce the message that violence against women must not be tolerated. The prevalence of violence against women worldwide is still high, with challenges ranging from the underreporting of incidents, to barriers to justice, protection and services, and insufficient enforcement of legislation. States are encouraged to adopt a systematic approach based on human rights and gender equality, and to adopt legislation that not only criminalizes such violence, but also mandates prevention and protection for victims/survivors.

Also before the Committee was a note by the Secretary-General, transmitting the report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Rashida Manjoo, (document [A/67/227](#)) who provides an overview of her work and discusses the issue of violence against women with disabilities. The report notes that while ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and other international law instruments is widespread, it has been difficult to assess implementation of those instruments with regard to preventing and responding to violence against women with disabilities. Most States lack a specific and comprehensive law, policy or programmes on persons with disabilities in general or on women with disabilities in particular. States that have a disability law do not specifically address the rights of women with disabilities.

As such, States should ensure an empowerment perspective, as opposed to a vulnerability perspective, the report says, and apply a social model of disability, as opposed to a medical or charity model, within prevention and response work on violence against women with disabilities. Among other things, the report also recommends that States should revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex/gender against women with disabilities and address gender bias against those women in the administration of justice. They should improve and expand disaggregated data collection, including on the prevalence, manifestations, causes and consequences of violence against women with disabilities.

The Committee also had before it a note by the Secretariat on ending female genital mutilation (document [A/C.3/67/L.2](#)), by which the Committee would take

note of the Secretary-General's report on that topic and decide to consider the issue of ending female genital mutilation at its sixty-seventh session under the agenda item "Advancement of Women".

The report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (document [A/67/38](#)) summarizes that body's work during the forty-ninth session, held from 11 to 29 July 2011, as well as the fiftieth session, held from 3 to 21 October 2011, and the fifty-first session, held from 13 February to 2 March 2012.

Also before the Committee was the Secretary-General's report on Trafficking in women and girls (document [A/67/170](#)), which details efforts by States and the United Nations to tackle that issue. It recommends that States ensure that laws criminalizing trafficking in persons, especially women and girls, are developed in line with standards set by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols. States also should create specialized investigation units, prosecution offices, judges and/or courts to increase the number of investigations and prosecutions.

Updated gender-sensitive national plans were also needed, the report says, as were national, multisectoral coordination mechanisms. The report also recommends that States implement bilateral, multilateral and regional agreements to ensure action in all areas, including law enforcement and prosecution, prevention and victim support. They should take more action to deal with the issues that make people vulnerable to trafficking, notably poverty and educational access.

The Secretary-General's report on Supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula (document [A/67/258](#)) outlines efforts made at the international, regional and national levels, and by the United Nations, to end that childbirth injury. It offers recommendations to intensify efforts, within a human rights-based approach, to end obstetric fistula as a key step towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 5, by improving maternal health, strengthening health systems, reducing health inequities, and increasing the levels and predictability of funding.

Also before the Committee was the Secretary-General's note (document [A/67/261](#)) transmitting the interim report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Joy Ezeilo, which covers the 1 August 2011 to 31 July 2012 period. It contains a thematic analysis of human trafficking in supply chains, in which the Special Rapporteur examines the international legal framework and standards applicable to States and businesses, as well as non-binding codes of conduct and principles adopted by businesses. It also offers

examples of public-private partnerships.

Among her recommendations, the Special Rapporteur notes wide international consensus that businesses have responsibilities to respect human rights and are uniquely positioned to prevent trafficking risks in their supply chains. The companies should become signatories to the Global Compact and the Athens Ethical Principles, assess their production chains and adopt company-wide policies to eliminate risks. For their part, States should ratify the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Person, Especially Women and Children, and ensure the enforcement of relevant laws.

The Committee also had before it the Secretary-General's report on Measures taken and progress achieved in follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (document [A/67/185](#)), which focuses on the extent to which gender perspectives are reflected in selected intergovernmental processes of the United Nations.

Among its conclusions, the report notes there was little evidence that a gender perspective was integrated into the General Assembly's work in the areas of disarmament and related international security questions, administrative and budgetary issues and international legal matters. In addition, the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions should more systematically integrate a gender perspective. It recommends the Assembly reiterate its call to all intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations to fully mainstream a gender perspective into all issues under their consideration and within their mandates.

The Secretary-General's report on the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system (document [A/67/347](#)) provides information on the status of women in the 32 funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations for the 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2011 period. It contains statistics, information and analysis on progress made and obstacles encountered in achieving gender balance and improvement in the status of women.

It notes that, notwithstanding progressive trends, there remains both an inverse relationship between the level and the representation of women (except the ungraded level) and a slowing in the overall rate of growth. The proportion of women stands at 60.2 per cent at the P-1 level and 27.4 per cent at the D-2 level, and the growth rate in women's overall representation slowed from 1.5 percentage points in the previous two-year reporting period to 0.8 percentage points in the current reporting period.

At the present rate of change, the General Assembly mandate to achieve gender parity by 2000, now 12 years past due, will not be achieved for 102 years at the higher levels (D-1 to ungraded) and 20 years at all Professional levels. Heads of department and senior managers should prioritize women's representation at both those levels across functions. Temporary special measures for women's advancement should be used for the placement of women candidates who are equally or substantially better qualified, and should be introduced or restored in entities where progress is slow.

UN-Women

Presenting the reports of the Secretary-General prepared by UN-Women, LAKSHMI PURI, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships Bureau, said the Committee was meeting at a time of great promise and opportunity for women and girls around the world, but also at a time of disappointment, with persistent challenges and slow progress. More women were also exercising leadership in politics and business than at any time in history; last year the Committee adopted a landmark resolution on women and political participation, and the number of countries reaching the 30 per cent mark of women in parliament had risen from 27 to 33.

However, "we need to continuously push the envelope and increase the standards and norms of gender empowerment", she said. The report on measures taken and progress achieved in follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (document A/67/185) identified only about one third of the reports before the General Assembly that included a gender perspective. "It's not enough to just fold in references to women and girls among other things," she said. As the Committee considered its post-2015 development agenda, she urged it "to keep gender equality and women's empowerment front and centre of any framework".

Pervasive and continued violence against women in all countries and regions was a serious, universal problem made apparent in the report on Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (document A/67/220). Last week, she said, gunmen shot 14-year-old Malala Yousufzai of Pakistan while she was on a school bus, for speaking out on the girls' rights to education and freedom from violence. That case shocked the world, but violence against women could be witnessed every day. "As many as 7 in 10 women around the world report having experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime," she said.

The most pervasive form of violence was intimate partner violence, which was “hidden under a cloak of silence and impunity” and frequently led to serious physical injuries and psychological consequences, often resulting in death. “Violence against women constitutes the most severe expression of discrimination and disempowerment of women and girls. It is a threat to democracy, peace and security, an obstacle to sustainable development and an appalling human rights violation,” she said, calling for creation of a “virtuous cycle” by changing mindsets and stereotypes at the root of violence, thus preventing the violence.

A coordinated and systematic approach was needed to eliminate violence against women, and it needed to be funded, implemented and monitored, she said. That was also apparent in the report on Trafficking in women and girls (document A/67/170). Trafficking was one of the fastest growing, high-impact crimes, and 98 per cent of all victims of sexual exploitation were female, she said, calling for holistic, specialized and gender-sensitive strategies to prevent, combat and respond to trafficking.

As the primary values-based, standard-setting organization, the United Nations had a particular responsibility to lead by example, but the report on the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system (document A/67/347) showed that progress had been mixed. The Secretary-General had done more than ever to promote women to senior positions, but the overall representation of women in the United Nations system only grew marginally, from 39.9 per cent to 40.7 per cent; the range of representation remained uneven, mirroring the labour market outside the system. She was confident that the System-wide Action Plan developed by UN-Women to hold senior managers accountable would be a powerful tool to advance the agenda of gender parity.

In the past two years, UN-Women had worked very intensely with more than 30 countries, and she urged continued support going forward, calling for the Committee’s support through resolutions, political and financial support. Last year, the Committee adopted a resolution urging States to increase funding for UN-Women, while grateful for support so far, 90 per cent of UN-Women’s funding came from voluntary contributions, and additional funds were needed to deliver on its mandate.

Anti-Discrimination Committee

NICOLE AMELINE, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, said women were often the first victims of violence, conflicts and discrimination and — at the same time — the main drivers

of a fair development. She was proud to announce that this year marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, recalling that from its modest beginning, the Committee had grown to provide a dynamic interpretation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and later, its Optional Protocol. Today, it stood as a “strong and internationally respected voice” for the rights of women and girls everywhere.

To mark that occasion, the Committee had held an anniversary event in New York in July, she said, which had been supported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN-Women, and focused on women’s political participation. Another event would be held on 18 October, supported by OHCHR and the International Organization of la Francophonie, focusing on the human rights of women in armed conflict and post-conflict in French speaking Africa. Turkey also would host an anniversary event and Committee retreat in November, to advance a number of pending matters, including treaty body strengthening.

Despite progress made in national legislation and the global consensus reached on women’s rights, “we need to maintain our common struggle”, she said. “Progress should never be taken for granted.” It was crucial to remain vigilant in combating challenges, such as underrepresentation of women in political and public life, women’s marginalization in post-conflict reconstruction efforts, harmful practices, domestic violence and trafficking. Common efforts must aim to give new impetus to the implementation of the Convention. With that in mind, she said that to date, the Committee had reviewed over 400 country reports and, through constructive dialogues with Governments, provided guidance on improving women’s situations in the countries concerned. Its jurisprudence under the Optional Protocol was an emerging area of importance, which had proven to be influential in the creation of international women’s rights jurisprudence.

Turning to the Convention and its Optional Protocol, she noted that 187 States were party to the Convention and she encouraged the remaining States to join it. The Optional Protocol — which mandated the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to consider petitions and inquiries into allegations of grave or systematic violations — had been accepted by 104 States parties. Côte d’Ivoire was the most recent State to have acceded to the Optional Protocol on 20 January 2012. On other matters, she said the Committee had considered or scheduled for consideration all reports that were 10 years or more overdue. While it considered an average of 24 reports annually, recently, it had not been able to keep up with the pace of submission. Forty-three reports were

awaiting its consideration. Under the Optional Protocol, the Committee was examining individual communications and had six inquiries — including requests for inquiries — pending consideration.

As for resources, she recognized the “remarkable quality” of support provided by the Secretariat, but also said she was “very concerned” about that support, which should be reinforced by resources to allow it to pursue its mission. On treaty body strengthening, she welcomed the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on that matter, saying it capped a three-year consultation process among all stakeholders — in which the Committee had played an active role. Its proposals aimed to create a more efficient, inclusive treaty bodies system of independent review and guidance on the implementation of international human rights standards. For its part, the Committee had adopted a resolution supporting — in principle — the “Addis Ababa guidelines”, noting that it would continue to discuss that issue.

She said the Committee had taken measures to increase its efficiency by reviewing its working methods in light of proposals contained in the High Commissioner’s report and in the observations of State parties. It was also fully committed to reinforcing the constructive dialogue with State parties and coordination for implementing the Convention. Further, it encouraged the input of non-governmental organizations, national human rights institutions, parliamentarians and other actors, including United Nations programmes, funds and specialized agencies. The Committee had a special cooperative relationship with UN-Women, rooted in its traditional links with the gender-related entities brought together under the new institution. It also met with relevant special mandate holders to strengthen coordination.

She went on to say that on 20 July 2012, the Committee had been informed by the High Commissioner that its July session would be moved from New York to Geneva, which raised concerns about the “serious detrimental impact” of the decision on the Committee’s interactions with key women’s rights actors in New York. The decision seemed to have been based solely on budgetary issues, notably a shortfall of less than \$100,000 in the costs of servicing the Committee in New York. The Committee remained concerned about the severe consequences of the decision on the effectiveness of its work. It should be noted that the Convention clearly provided for the Committee’s involvement in such a decision. She insisted the matter be taken up within the ongoing treaty body strengthening process, and that a decision be taken only after such an assessment.

Finally, she outlined her wishes for a fruitful collaboration with the Third

Committee, underlining first the importance of consolidating links and reinforcing the role of the Committee within the United Nations. She also wished to improve coordination on the issue of implementation of the Convention, notably with regard to the development of public policies, and to unify efforts in the implementation of the treaty body strengthening process. The Committee also wished to strengthen its efforts to improve women's rights, and hoped to the Third Committee's support in maintaining the New York session.

Question and Answer Session

When the floor was opened to questions and comments, Japan's delegate noted that it was important to deepen understanding on gender-sensitive efforts during disasters. He looked forward to the Anti-Discrimination Committee sharing its thoughts on that matter. One recommendation had been to collaborate with UN-Women, which had field offices to promote the implementation of recommendations and he asked how the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women could develop its relationship with other relevant organizations.

European Union's delegate said Anti-Discrimination Committee's progress had been extraordinary, noting that the European Union had met with the Committee for an informed briefing this summer. The Committee's activity was impressive, having reviewed over 400 country reports and played a role in treaty body strengthening. She asked how the Committee was incorporating the recommendations on treaty body strengthening contained in the report of the OHCHR.

Slovenia's delegate highlighted the importance his country placed on women's advancement. He asked Ms. AMELINE about the forms of discrimination against women that were most pertinent and trends of improvement or regression in that regard. He was satisfied with the Committee's results and urged continued progress at the same pace.

Costa Rica's delegate asked about the impact of holding the Committee's meeting in Geneva, rather than New York.

Responding, Ms. AMELINE said the Committee had begun a broad reflection on the new general recommendation on displaced persons, and further, how it tied into the issue of climate change. Also, it would be important to have a methodology on women in conflict and the involvement of regional organizations in that work would help guarantee success. "We're looking for stronger collaboration with States and regional actors," she said. It was of the utmost

importance to have greater visibility.

With regard to the evolution of the Committee, she said a working group had been established and a number of measures had been developed aimed at increasing efficiency. Through constructive dialogue, the most important issues had been identified. The Committee had changed the format of conclusions and recommendations reports, and tried to be more economical with its time. The treaty body strengthening process was very important in such efforts. There was an urgent need for greater cooperation with regional organizations and the Committee was fully prepared for that.

Commending Slovenia's efforts, she said that establishing assessment and follow-up mechanisms for the Convention's implementation was essential.

Also, she noted that the Committee wished keep its session in New York because UN-Women was a new entity and it was of the utmost importance to link to its efforts.

Also responding, Ms. PURI said it was a priority for UN-Women to work with the Committee in different ways. She described the relationship as an "umbilical cord" in that it was a strong, organic relationship. The Committee was a major forum to ensure that the norms that States adhered to were carried out on the ground. Through general recommendations, knowledge and best practices were being established. The relationship with the Committee would continue to be a very strong and effective partnership.

In another round of questions, the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, noting that UN-Women and the Anti-Discrimination Committee were working in her country, appealed for assistance in establishing a link between Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and reinforcing capacities to involve women in political and peace processes. "We continue to face problems in the east of the country, where children and women are suffering a great deal," she said. There was no peace. She urged the Committee and UN-Women to focus on women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and take decisions to help her country develop mechanisms to implement the Convention.

Responding, Ms. AMELINE said the issue of women in conflict was on everyone's mind and the challenge was to determine which measures could be taken up to overcome that problem. The Committee was elaborating a general recommendation on that problem and she underlined the relationship between the Committee and UN-Women in that regard, which could be useful.

Ms. PURI added that UN-Women was present on the ground, supporting women through gender advisors, in particular to ensure women benefitted from peacebuilding, were part of peacebuilding and received the required protection in conflict and post-conflict situations. She recommitted UN-Women to reinforcing its work in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the situation was “still very conflict-ridden”.

United Nations Population Fund

Introducing the Secretary-General’s report on “Supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula”, ANNE-BIRGITTE ALBRECHTSEN, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Deputy Executive Director (Management), said that every day, almost 800 women died from pregnancy complications. “For every woman who dies, 20 or more are injured or disabled,” she said, noting that one of the most serious injuries of childbearing was obstetric fistula, a hole in the birth canal caused by obstructed labour, due to a lack of adequate medical care. As a result, the baby was stillborn or died within the first week of life, and the woman suffered an injury that left her permanently incontinent, ashamed and ostracized and very much alone. Many women and girls who suffered from fistula were excluded from community life and abandoned by their husbands and families, making it difficult to maintain a source of income, and thus, deepening their poverty.

While obstetric fistula had been virtually eliminated in industrialized nations, in the developing world, an estimated 2 to 3.5 million women and girls still lived with the condition, she said, and 50,000 to 100,000 new cases developed each year. Obstetric fistula was both preventable and treatable. Victims were usually poor and illiterate with limited access to healthcare. The persistence of the condition also reflected broader economic and sociocultural challenges facing women and girls: poverty, gender inequality, lack of schooling, child marriage and early child-bearing impeded opportunities, while the absence of preventive care violated their basic human rights.

Citing the report, she said that in the last two years, attention had focused on maternal and newborn health, and on addressing obstetric fistula, with progress mainly due to effective interventions, enhanced data collection and advocacy programmes. Also, the inter-agency “H4+” group — which involved the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UNFPA, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UN-Women, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank — was working with Governments to promote maternal, newborn and child health. Further, in 2003, UNFPA and its partners launched the world’s first global Campaign to End Fistula. But ending obstetric fistula required “vastly

intensified” efforts at the national, regional and international levels.

The factors that led women and girls to develop obstetric fistula were the same that caused maternal morbidity and mortality, she said, naming gender inequality, lack of human rights protection and lack of access to a continuum of healthcare throughout the life cycle. With that, she joined the Secretary-General in calling on the international community to devote more funding to Millennium Development Goal 5 (maternal health), to eliminate obstetric fistula and guarantee universal access to reproductive health by 2015. “If we make the health and rights of women and girls a priority, we can make every pregnancy and childbirth safe,” she insisted, “and eliminate obstetric fistula everywhere.”

Statements

MOURAD BENMEHIDI (Algeria), on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said, despite progress advancing gender equality over the last few decades, many women and girls around the world were still falling victim to numerous forms of discrimination and did not have equal opportunities to fulfil their potential. High levels of poverty, gender violence, HIV and AIDS, and widespread unemployment and lack of social services needed to be overcome to achieve equality for women. The role of UN-Women was of utmost importance in promoting better coordination within the United Nations system to address the multiple barriers that impede the advancement of women.

New threats and challenges were also emerging, he said, stressing the need to address the impacts of global economic and food crises, energy access, distortions and impediments to international trade and challenges caused by climate change. Gender-responsive budgeting initiatives were needed to address gaps in policies, and it was necessary to promote increased political participation of women. “As Member States strive for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, we must recognize the contribution of progress in gender equality and the empowerment of women to these goals,” he said.

He called for enhancing international cooperation and global partnership to empower women, including fulfilment of commitments on official development assistance, debt relief and financial and technical support. It was important to promote the economic empowerment of women and their ability to generate income as vital development agents. To further the goal of gender equality, the Group would present during this session a draft resolution entitled, “Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly.”

CÉCILE MBALLA EYENGA (Cameroon), speaking on behalf of the African States and aligning with the Group of 77 and China, said Africa continued to champion women's advancement through various initiatives, including the declaration of 2010 to 2020 as "African Women's Decade". Since the Beijing Conference, most African countries had adopted important commitments and protocols, including the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa and the African Union Gender Policy. Much progress had been made in terms of women's empowerment through microcredit programmes, and particular attention had been given to maternal health. The majority of African women lived in rural areas — they were decision makers, producers and providers, workers and entrepreneurs.

She said rural women accounted for a greater portion of the agricultural labour force, grew the majority of the world's food and performed the most unpaid care work. Their contributions were vital to families and both local and national economies. Yet, their priorities had been largely overlooked. They were disproportionately impacted by the crises in food finance and energy, and lacked basic services like water and sanitation. The African Group was frustrated that the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, held earlier this year, had resulted in no agreed conclusions on such an important priority theme. She hoped that future mutual respect for cultural diversity and ethical values would be maintained, and that human rights and fundamental freedoms given the recognition it deserved.

On other matters, she called for intensified efforts against violence against women, noting that whether it was sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation, child pornography or child marriage, the result was the same: women and girls were prevented from fully enjoying human rights. Child marriage threatened the health of young girls. The Group reaffirmed that female genital mutilation was a serious threat to women's and girls' health, including their sexual and reproductive health, which could increase their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. While States had a primary role in ending violence against women, religious leaders also played a role and she urged them to use their voices to enhance awareness about the detrimental impact of harmful practices on women and girls, and support social change to abandon such practices.

BAHARUDIN ABU BAKAR (Malaysia), on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said despite different levels of development in the region, it was committed to advancing the status of women. This year, the region's Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children convened a consultative meeting on a rights-based approach to

address all forms of violence against women and children the had helped highlight good practices and experiences implementing laws, policies and actions to promote an integrated agenda for violence prevention and elimination and improve data and research on the magnitude of the problem.

Among initiatives over the next two years, ASEAN planned to: publish best practices in eliminating violence against women and children in Member States; develop a regional network of social service agencies; carry out a public campaign to stop violence against women through activities commemorating the International Day on Anti-Violence Against Women, formulate activities to strengthen economic rights of women, and draw up a regional progress report on women's advancement and gender equality.

ASEAN supported further efforts to mainstream the gender perspective into all areas of work of intergovernmental bodies, and believed that full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was integral to achieving internationally agreed development goals. "We further believe that the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women should feature prominently in the post-2015 development framework," he said. More work needed to be done towards achieving our common goals in advancing and protecting the rights of women, and ASEAN reaffirmed its readiness to cooperate closely with all interested partners and stakeholders.

GEORGE TALBOT (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and aligning with both the Group of 77 and China, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, said Caribbean history — from slavery to independence — bore ample testimony to the crucial role played by women in all aspects of development. Today, States were working to achieve internationally agreed gender equality and women's empowerment goals, especially in the areas of poverty alleviation. But, cumulatively, laws to criminalize violence against women, national plans and awareness-raising campaigns had had a limited impact, which spoke to a "systemic failure" of measures adopted since Beijing to reverse the horrific tide of physical and mental trauma inflicted daily upon women.

For its part, CARICOM had carried out preventive measures, including a series of campaign materials on gender-based violence on the occasion of International Women's Day on 8 March. In May, three young women participated in the first Global UNiTE Youth Forum, as part of the Secretary-General's campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women. At the national level, States had enhanced legislative measures and developed monitoring frameworks to address gender-based violence. With support from the United Nations Development Fund for

Women (UNIFEM), a standardized court-based batterer intervention programme aimed to engage men in changing negative gender stereotypes. In terms of education, most CARICOM States had achieved universal primary education, but the region still faced cultural and attitudinal biases that perpetuated gender stereotypes in higher education. Women's and girls' health also was a great concern, as young women were among the most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Finally, he said the theme of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women focused on rural women, who constituted one fourth of the world's population and 25 per cent of the agricultural labour force. Today marked the International Day of Rural Women and he reiterated CARICOM's commitment to working with all partners to enhance their opportunities. The elimination of discrimination was as vital to women's development as the issue of violence against women. In that regard, he noted concern at the decision to convene all the Anti-Discrimination Committee sessions for considering States Parties reports in Geneva, which would pose significant challenges for small States that did not have representation there. In conclusion, he welcomed women's role in all pillars of the United Nations' work and strongly supported the inclusion of both gender equality and women's empowerment as an integral part of the post-2015 development framework.

ESTHER MCHEKA CHILENJE NKHOMA (Malawi), on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said the issue of violence against women and girls was of great importance to her region, which had adopted an ambitious protocol on gender and development that outlined 28 targets to be reached by 2015. The protocol called on Member States to enact and enforce legislation prohibiting all forms of gender violence and prevent human trafficking. Currently, 12 of the 14 SADC States had in place domestic violence laws and 11 had integrated national action plans that addressed gender-based violence, she said. The SADC was working with others to address the remaining gaps between policies and implementation.

"SADC upholds the fact that the education and training of women and girls is the key for their emancipation, empowerment and effective participation and professional advancement," she said. "It is also a vital tool for the campaign to bring an end to violence against women and girls." Global gross primary school enrolment for girls was 96 per cent, but 92 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. At secondary school, enrolment globally was 97 per cent, but it was 79 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. There was a need to ensure that girls completed their education and that women had increased access to technological and vocational training through which they could gain economic independence, she said.

In Malawi, she was glad to inform the Committee that, for the first time, there was a female Head of State and Government, President Joyce Banda, the second female president in Africa. “Let me also mention that women’s representation in parliament is also increasing with each election,” she said. The Government of Malawi was fully committed to implementing international protocols and conventions on the rights of women and girls, but to sustainably bring an end to gender-based violence and achieve women’s advancement, stronger collaboration and cooperation was needed between Member States, development partners, donors, academia, researchers, civil society, community leaders and women and girls themselves.

VERÓNICA CHAHÍN (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, expressed her deep commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment, reaffirming the importance of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Seventeen years had passed since the Fourth World Conference on Women. Today, there was a need to promote women’s participation in decision-making and to increase their representation in public office. The Community had adopted measures to improve its legal and regulatory frameworks by enacting gender quality legislation. Applauding UN-Women’s programme to encourage women’s leadership and political participation, among other efforts, she said much remained to be done in the face of global challenges. The status of women was a matter of growing concern.

She urged more international dialogue, consensus and cooperation, including regional, North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation to address the needs of women and girls in policies addressing crises in food, finance and energy, as well as in removing international trade barriers. In that regard, she noted the Brasilia Consensus, adopted at the 2010 Eleventh Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, as the basis for the region’s work on the advancement of women. The Community was strongly committed to eradicating violence against women, and she noted the UNiTE to End Violence against Women in that context. She also called on States to establish focal points to coordinate work in combating the smuggling of migrants among countries of origin, transit and destination.

She went on to stress that priority must be given to eradicating poverty, guaranteeing adequate food and housing, and ensuring access to health care, including its sexual and reproductive aspects. She reaffirmed support for Human Rights Council resolution 15/23 to establish a working group of independent experts on discrimination against women in law. More generally, she reiterated the importance of national gender mechanisms to promote gender equality policies and emphasized the need for more international cooperation in assisting

developing countries in designing gender equality initiatives. She also stressed that the private sector, non-governmental organizations, academia, research institutions and social, cultural and political organizations must be involved in achieving women's advancement.

MOOTAZ AHMADEIN KHALIL (Egypt), on behalf of the Arab Group, said enhancing the status of women was essential for economic, social and human development. The Arab Women's Organization, established by the League of Arab States in 2003, contributed to the development of the status of women, raising public awareness on Arab women's issues and mainstreaming them in the priorities of overall development plans and policies. The Arab Group stressed the need to intensify efforts for preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women in all parts of the world, and appreciated activities of United Nations entities in that aim.

It was important to empower women through education and training in areas of public management, public policy, economics, information technology and science to ensure they acquired the necessary knowledge and skills to contribute fully and effectively to their societies. "Improving women's access to information and communication technology, including e-government tools, contributes to the empowerment of women in order to participate in various aspects of life. It also contributes to the elimination of negative stereotypes and enhancing the positive role of women in society," he said.

"The Arab Group condemns the growing difficulties women face in the Arab territories occupied by Israel," he said, calling for Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UN-Women, to pay increasing attention to the suffering of women under foreign occupation, and appoint a focal point to address their situation, in accordance with international law. "The Group also calls for the international community to provide all possible support to Palestinian women under occupation to enjoy all human rights, including the right to live in their own independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital," he said.

IOANNIS VRILAS (European Union) said women were part of their countries' future — success was dependent on ensuring their equal role and right to participate in political, economic and social life. He reiterated the European Union's strong support for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which remained a highly relevant and valuable normative framework. Women in North Africa and the Middle East were taking a leading role pushing for transformation. "Gender did not matter when striving for political change, nor should it be an excluding factor in the political processes that followed. Not least

because that would mean squandering scarce resources needed to deal with a multitude of political, social and economic issues,” he said.

While no country had achieved full gender equality, there were lessons to share. Women in decision-making positions should become the norm, rather than the singular, hard-won exception. Women represented less than 20 per cent of members in national parliaments, and even less among Government ministers. And they were underrepresented on lists of political candidates, as discriminatory societal attitudes. Women and women’s perspectives also must be represented at all high-level international discussions on security, development, human rights and the environment, including in the post-2015 development process. “Studies confirm that women play an instrumental role in safeguarding scarce natural resources,” he said.

UN-Women had set out to fulfil the crucial task of addressing the gaps in United Nations support for gender equality and the empowerment of women, and the European Union intensified its cooperation with UN-Women this year in a memorandum of understanding that created a more strategic partnership on such areas as gender and justice, women’s leadership and political participation, women’s access to economic empowerment, combating sexual and gender based violence, and humanitarian aid. “Women’s representation in all stages of peace processes and among mediators and peacemakers remains regrettably low. We consider the engagement and support of women raises the chances for building a peace that lasts,” he said.

ANTONIA STRACHWITZ (Liechtenstein) commended the Anti-Discrimination Committee’s tremendous work, even in a dire resource situation, for which the General Assembly bore primary responsibility. She hoped the problem would be addressed in a sustainable way in the upcoming treaty body strengthening negotiations. Studies had shown that two out of three women worldwide had experienced gender-based violence at least once in their lifetime; however, only a small fraction of those incidents were reported to the police, and of those reported, only a few had led to convictions. “We have to ask ourselves why so many women who have become victims of gender-based violence refuse to talk about their experiences,” she stressed, noting that one factor was that a majority of women who reported rape or assault had been victimized by an acquaintance.

Thus, States must raise awareness, she said, build trust in their judicial systems and train officials to provide support to victims. On sexual violence, which was still a problem in armed conflict situations, she said such abuse must be addressed through all stages of conflict resolution, from ceasefire agreements to the presence of gender expertise at the peace table. Gender-based violence

hampered productivity, reduced human capital and undermined economic growth. Amid broad transitions to what she hoped would be “a new era” of democratic and participatory societies around the world, States must do more to protect women’s rights to participate on equal terms throughout the political transition, and guarantee their rights to speak their minds and assemble freely.

AMIRA FAHMY (Egypt) aligning with the Group of 77 and China, the African Group and the Arab Group, said the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June reaffirmed the common commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action. Reports submitted under that item had highlighted the challenges to ensuring its full realization, including discrimination and violence against women. Egypt was deeply concerned at the grave situation of women and girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon and Syria. She regretted that reports submitted under that item did not refer to that dire humanitarian situation.

She appreciated support by UN-Women, through the Cairo office, to promote women’s political participation and economic empowerment. The National Council for Women had been “reconstituted” in March and its priorities now included eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women, stopping female genital mutilation and enhancing women’s political participation. Acting on the Council’s proposal, a decree was issued in April 2011 to toughen the penalty for rape, abduction and sexual harassment. Another proposal would be submitted to parliament to ensure elimination of discrimination. The Council had developed an ambitious strategy to enhance women’s political participation, with a training centre established to that end. Other priorities included ensuring women’s access to finance and microfinance, expanding medical services for women in remote areas, and working with the Coordinating Committee to Combat and Prevent Trafficking in Persons.

WANG YAN (China), associating with the Group of 77 and China, said promoting women’s rights had a great bearing on world peace and development. Enormous progress had been made in the spirit of the Beijing Declaration, Programme of Action and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The concept of gender equality had found its way into Government decision-making and that had led to improved living conditions for women in various countries. At the same time, the global financial crisis had been felt primarily by women in the feminization of poverty. Gender discrimination was widespread and the trafficking of women and girls persisted, despite efforts to stem that abuse. Raising women’s status had become an urgent matter and she urged addressing it by helping developing countries solve entrenched problems of poverty, employment and health, with a view to strengthening their development

capacity.

She said technical assistance should be scaled up in developing countries, so all women could be the beneficiaries and drivers of progress. Countries should improve rural women's role in development. Governments should take a comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming in political, economic and social development strategies. With 653 million women in its population, China had attached great importance to women's development. In July 2011, China had outlined plans for the 2011-2020 period, identifying women's participation as among its fundamental principles, with 88 policy measures covering health, education, social security, environment and the law, among other areas. China also supported the work of the CSW. China had hosted the Fourth World Conference of Women and its tenth anniversary, as well as a conference on "women and sustainable development" last year. China was willing to enhance consultation with all actors that were working for women's interests in China and the world.

JORGE VALERO (Venezuela), aligning with the Group of 77 and China, and CELAC, said a "great evil" of capitalism was women's exclusion from society. "We value the fundamental rights of women", he said, noting that Venezuela's constitution guaranteed those rights. Work in the home was assessed as a creator of social wealth and well-being. Venezuela's policies, programmes and projects aimed to protect women's human rights and to develop their participation in diverse aspects of life. Through the Ministry for Women, the Bank for the Development of Women and the National Ombudsman to defend women's rights, Venezuela carried out various actions to eradicate violence against women. National gender indicators were monitored through the national observatory of gender equality. Of five public powers, three were headed by women: electoral; "moral"; and the judiciary.

He went on to say that measures to prevent the trafficking of women had been carried out and, within that framework, Venezuela was cooperating at the international level, considering the shared responsibility in that area. Also his Government was implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as the feminization of poverty continued to be a sad reality. The food crisis and international trade distortions, among other things, deprived developing countries of the resources needed to realize women's advancement. Further, new neo-colonial occupations were causing physical and psychological suffering for thousands of women and girls, which Venezuela condemned. He called for according the equality and dignity of women the highest priority in public policy.

ANA MARIE L. HERNANDO (Philippines) said the elimination of violence against

women lay at the core of gender equality and empowerment of women but, regrettably, its prevalence worldwide remained high. She called for greater commitment by Member States to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action to fully realize gender equality, and expressed support to the Commission on Status of Women, hoping for a productive and successful outcome for its forthcoming session under the priority theme “Elimination and Prevention of all forms of Violence against Women”. It was important that a critical mass of support was generated to come up with a set of concrete recommendations for action. Advancement of women and gender equality was integral to a country’s progress, she said. The Philippine Constitution ensured fundamental equality before the law, and mandated the State to develop measures to address discrimination and inequality.

Last year’s adoption of the Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers was a major addition to the international human rights framework protecting women migrant workers, one of the most vulnerable sectors in society. “As a nation with one tenth of its population beyond its borders, migration remains a major feature in Philippine society, as it does in many societies worldwide. While migration broadens economic opportunities and promotes economic independence of workers, it also makes them more vulnerable toward inhumane treatment and many forms of violence and abuse in work places,” she said. “Thus, the Philippines advocates for adoption by the international community of targeted measures to specifically address discrimination, violence and exploitation against migrant workers, in particular women and girls.”

LAURIE SHESTACK PHIPPS (United States) said empowering women was a priority in her country’s foreign policy, and the United States was pleased the Committee would focus on violence against women. One in three women worldwide would experience gender-based violence in their lifetime, while two to three million were subject each year to female genital mutilation. The United States was committed to a comprehensive strategy on gender empowerment which was issued by executive order in August, pursuing numerous initiatives to combat human trafficking and female genital mutilation. Concerning human trafficking “or, more accurately, modern slavery”, the United States looked to the Palermo Protocol as a guide, and was taking measures against businesses linked to trafficking through unscrupulous recruitment practices. The United States was also committed to strengthening training and harnessing technology so that trafficking victims could be treated as victims, not criminals.

The United States was also helping countries curb female genital mutilation through projects such as the Kenya Centre of Excellence at Nairobi University,

which was helping strengthen the basis for people across the continent to turn away from the practice, taking cultural sensitivities into account. Because violence against women and the threat of violence prevented women from fully participating in society and inhibited them from full economic participation, efforts must also focus on economic empowerment. In closing, she said Member States also must take into account reproductive rights; it was critical for women to be empowered to decide the number, time and spacing of their pregnancies. More broadly, the United States was deeply disappointed that the Rio Conference could not reach consensus to include language on reproductive rights in outcome documents, and hoped those would be reaffirmed in future deliberations.

EMMANUEL BICHET (Switzerland) highlighted some obstacles to the advancement of women. “If women are to stand on equal terms with men, it is incumbent upon us to advance their economic empowerment,” he said, adding “this will require ensuring the education of girls and the protection of a women’s right to control her own body.” Women and girls must enjoy full access to sexual and reproductive health services. Without such efforts, the social and economic empowerment of women and girls would remain “an elusive goal”, he noted.

Another hurdle to female empowerment was gender-based violence committed as part of such “traditional” practices as female genital mutilation, child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage, he said. Such practices caused the victims lasting physical and mental harm, and severely compromise their health. They also deprived girls of an education, a prerequisite for attaining economic independence. Through migration, there may be women and girls living in Switzerland who could fall victim to a forced marriage or genital mutilation. In July, a new provision in the Swiss Penal Code had come into force, making female genital mutilation a criminal offense. Greater prevention and awareness-raising efforts would be needed beyond that legislation to put an end to those devastating practices once and for all. The lack of support and compensation to victims of violence also stood as an obstacle to female empowerment, he said, urging States to step up the fight against impunity for gender-based crimes. He also stressed the need for effective measures to reintegrate the victims into society, calling on Governments to increase contributions to the Trust Fund for Victims.

BRUNO SANTOS DE OLIVEIRA (Brazil), associating with the Group of 77 and China, and CELAC, said a little more than half of Brazilians living in extreme poverty were women. They were more cruelly affected by the lack of resources and access to public services. “But this is changing,” he said. Women were now the main beneficiaries of cash-transfer programmes and housing credit. Some 93 per cent of the 13.5 million families in the *Bolsa Família*, an income-transfer

programme, had women as beneficiaries. The Government had improved income distribution, giving priority to children, pregnant women and women who were breast feeding.

He said Brazil was working to raise awareness and reduce teen pregnancy by improving access to information and free distribution of contraceptives. Moreover, through the “Thousand Women Programme”, women in a vulnerable situation were now gaining wider access to professional education, and therefore, jobs and income. The goal was to qualify 100,000 women by 2014. He said 2011 would be remembered as a landmark year, as it marked the first time Brazil had seen a woman take office as President. Women were underrepresented in decision-making in all areas. While they comprised 52 per cent of all Brazilian voters, only 10 per cent of parliamentarians were women. The President had made women’s participation in top decision-making levels a priority.

TANISHA HEWANPOLA (Australia) said last week’s shooting of Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani schoolgirl targeted for advocating a girl’s right to education, was a stark reminder of the enormity of the challenges ahead in achieving gender equality. Women’s advancement depended on eliminating all forms of violence against women. Whether in public spheres or private homes, women’s health, education, economic empowerment and political participation would only thrive where women’s safety was guaranteed. As such, Australia’s national plan to reduce violence against women and their children for the 2010-2022 period focused on prevention and fostering respectful relationships. Internationally, a key part of Australia’s development assistance aimed to empower women.

She said Australia’s \$320 million Pacific Gender Equality Initiative would expand women’s political, economic and social opportunities over the next decade. On other matters, she said conflict affected women and girls disproportionately and differently. Australia supported Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which recognized that women’s full participation in peace processes could contribute to the maintenance of international peace. Trafficking in persons also disproportionately affected women and girls. Regionally and internationally, Australia was proud to co-chair the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. Australia supported UN-Women and advocated for the Anti-Discrimination Committee and both the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In closing, she urged States to support regular briefings by the UN-Women Executive Director in the Security Council on developments in the area of gender equality, among others.

NORLIZA ABDUL RAHIM (Malaysia) said her country had acknowledged the key role that women played in driving forward national social, political and economic development, and in 1989 had formulated a National Policy on Women. The Government had adopted a number of measures to mainstream gender perspectives into the development process, including reviewing laws affecting women, improving access to education, enhancing training and upgrading health care. The Government's policy to ensure participation of at least 30 per cent of women in decision-making positions at all levels in the public sector had resulted in a significant increase in the number of qualified women appointed to important positions, such as vice-chancellors of universities, Governor of the Central Bank and judges in both civil and Sharia court systems.

Mindful that a significant number of women resided in rural areas, the Government also introduced income-generating programmes for the advancement of rural and indigenous women. "These women in remote areas are provided training on agricultural farming and best practices to enhance their agricultural skills and knowledge. In the long run, crop yields from such small scale plantations would help to positively contribute towards food sustainability and even towards raising family income," she said. With a view of sharing Malaysia's experiences and practices, especially with other developing countries, the Government continued to fund and support the work of the Non-Aligned Movement Institute for the Empowerment of Women.

ANKE VERVOORD (Netherlands) said that focusing on gender equality was not only morally right, but also had tremendous sociological and economic benefits in achieving food security. "Women make up nearly half the agricultural workforce. If they had access to the same resources as men, they could drive down hunger for up to one hundred and fifty million people," she stated. Research had shown that GDP growth driven by agriculture was twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth generated in other sectors and it had been proven that every dollar spent on agricultural research produced nine dollars of extra food in developing countries.

The international community should be talking with women, not about them, she said. In conversations with hundreds of rural women, she had been told they needed the right to own land, to be educated and to be kept abreast of the latest agricultural developments in light of climate change. She expressed disappointment that this year's Commission on the Status of Women had failed to reach agreement. "We must create a world in which women's empowerment will be an integral part of our day-to-day life, work and thinking," she said. That was vital as long as honour killings, child marriages and denial of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights were commonplace. "Food is a human right

and millions of women ensure we get our daily bread while they are hungry and amongst the poorest themselves,” she went on. “If you close your eyes to the tremendous potential and the needs of women there will never be global peace and security.”

MAYA DAGHER (Lebanon), aligning with the Arab Group and the Group of 77 and China, said violence against women occurred around the world, transcending culture, class and income. Women’s empowerment must be promoted in order for true development to take place. For its part, Lebanon based its work on the fundamental human rights principles found in article VII of the Convention on Civil and Political Rights. A number of its projects aimed to assist victims of domestic violence. Lebanon also was stepping up its cooperation with civil society in providing psychological and legal support to women, as well as legal aid to victims of violence.

Moreover, she said the Government was working to harmonize standards for legal proceedings vis-à-vis complaints by women. A draft law had been submitted to parliament on eliminating domestic violence. Indeed, combating such abuse was a national responsibility, work that must encompass a focus on education. A legal framework must be created, and work carried out to ensure women were able to fulfil their roles as citizens, so that “they were not a burden to men”. In sum, she said Lebanon looked forward to working with United Nations agencies in promoting women’s advancement.

HAJIYA ZAINAB MAINA, Minister of Women’s Affairs and Social Development of Nigeria, aligning herself with the Group of 77 developing countries and China, reviewed some of her country’s strides in the area of women’s empowerment, in which she said Nigeria had been “consistent”. Among those, it was committed to the passage of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill as a means to further enhance women’s equal access to social and economic activities and resources, including land, credit, education, vocational training and others. That bill - which would seek to domesticate the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa – was presently before the National Assembly for consideration. The Assembly was also considering the inclusion of the proposition of the Convention’s provisions in the ongoing review of Nigeria’s constitution, she said.

Nigeria had, for the first time, attained a 33 per cent female representation in executive decision-making positions and a 50 per cent female representation in the judiciary, with a woman as the Chief Justice of the Federation. There were 13 women on the Federal Cabinet with Ministerial rank. The second edition of

the “Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria” programme was also launched last month, and was targeted at young women aged 18-45. The Government had also introduced a Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme, with a view towards providing economic opportunities by engaging unskilled youth and women and reducing the unemployment rate and social vices in the country. It was also aimed at educating policy-makers, as well as the general public, on the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women and ensuring the proper development, protection and survival of the Nigerian child, she said.

TINE MØRCH SMITH (Norway) said that, last week, a 14-year-old girl named Malala Yousafzai had been shot and nearly killed for advocating every girl’s right to education. Across the world, women and girls were still being denied the most basic of rights, and, in standing up for them, they risked their health and lives. Most of the violence committed against women took place in the home, she added, “which should be the safest place of all”. It was inflicted by those who were closest to the victims – their parents, spouses and family members. While many people considered violence at home to be a family matter, she stressed, “let us be clear: violence against women is a crime, and it must be treated as such.”

Ending violence of that kind was a moral imperative, as was promoting gender equality. Both women and men had the right to a life free from violence. But, violence was also a contributing factor to poverty and lack of development for families, communities and entire countries. “Gender equality is crucial for the sustainable development of any country,” she added, noting that Norway knew that from its own experience. In that vein, the country would strive to protect the rights that women had gained over the past decades, rights and principles that Member States – with very few exceptions – had agreed on. Of particular importance were the sexual and reproductive rights of women and young people, she added, stressing that, besides being fundamental rights in themselves, they were also central to sustainable development. Millions of women, especially poor women in rural areas, did not have the freedom to control their own reproductive lives and health, and had limited access to basic reproductive health services; as a result, over a quarter of a million women died every year from pregnancy-related causes. “This is a tragedy and a grave social injustice,” she emphasized.

KADRA AHMED HASSAN (Djibouti) said the Constitution of her country guaranteed equality between men and women; her Government understood that really good political results could only be achieved with the participation of women. Its minimum age of marriage was now 18, while it had a law for a system of quotas for elected positions. In regard to representation of women in the political world, the Government’s policies were aimed at improving the

situation so that women were electing citizens, as well as elected citizens. Currently women made up 14 per cent of the membership of parliament, she said.

Education of girls and women also played a vital role in the promotion of their rights and achieving the Millennium Development Goals. For cultural reasons, there continued to be poor school enrolment for girls in rural areas, but the Government had implemented initiatives such as the adoption of a national day for registering girls and grants to encourage more education for girls. Violence against women was a scourge that existed around the world, and the Government continued to struggle against the problem, developing a legal guide to give women greater access to justice. Female genital mutilation was the form of violence most rampant in the country, and the government had imposed measures that reduced prevalence to 5 per cent. But, intensified efforts were needed. She concluded by saying her delegation was very pleased with the work of UN-Women and was committed to working towards its objectives.

SHIN DONG-IK (Republic of Korea) said, despite growing recognition of the rights of women as inalienable and a prerequisite for sustainable development, there was still a long way to go. Women continued to account for the vast majority of the world's poor, and found themselves being disproportionately affected by violence and discrimination. "Inequality can also be seen in the persistent gender wage gap and limited access to education and the labour market," he said. But no discussion of gender equality would be complete without reference to the task of eliminating violence against women; gender-based violence was one of the most pervasive violations of human rights of our times.

"What is even worse is that victims of violence bear the cost of the harm and stigma while perpetrators have been protected by a widespread culture of impunity, which allows such deplorable violence to persist," he said. A more comprehensive and holistic response was needed to effectively address violence against women, and his delegation appreciated the Human Rights Council's adoption of resolutions focusing on prevention of violence, protection for women subjected to violence and remedies for victims. Sexual abuse in conflict – one of the most egregious forms of human rights violation - also warranted serious attention. Drawing attention to "comfort women" forced into military sexual slavery during the Second World War, he said the case remained unresolved and the immeasurable pain and suffering of victims had yet to be addressed. His Government would like to urge the United Nations system and all Member States to make further efforts to end such crimes.

ELISA DIAZ GRAS (Mexico) said the Committee would be negotiating draft

resolutions on women's advancement, and of particular importance was the text on intensified efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. Data showed that seven out of ten women around the world claimed to have suffered physical/sexual violence, a situation that demanded States full commitment. The theme of the Commission on the Status of Women's next session would focus on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls and he hoped that this time, the Commission would rule conclusively on that extremely relevant matter. "We can't afford to fail again," he said, as had been the case with rural women.

He went on to say that the resolution on indigenous women, put forward by Mexico and others, reflected concern over the multiple forms of discrimination and poverty those women suffered. In addition, migrant women represented half of the 214 million migrants around the world and States could not afford to leave them behind. In other areas, he said Mexico had presented its combined seventh and eighth periodic report on compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and would follow-up on the Committee's recommendations. More broadly, there were many outstanding tasks in order to achieve full gender equality and realization of women's human rights. The challenge was to incorporate a gender perspective into all United Nations work and prioritize women's empowerment in the post-2015 development framework.

Mr. RAKOVSKIY (Russian Federation), noting the upcoming twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, said his Government would reject any commemoration that appeared to reconsider its outcome of internationally agreed goals. That issue must be discussed as part of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which was the platform for constructive dialogue on gender equality and women's advancement. He rejected any attempts to discredit its work or take over its remit. He also regretted that the Committee had been unable to reach a consensus on rural women at its fifty-sixth session. A stalemate had occurred because delegations had tried to use a noble topic to impose their own views on women's status. He hoped that such a situation would be avoided in the future.

He also cautioned against imposing on the Commission decisions that had not been taken by Governments. It was important to improve the Commission and he noted the initiative put forward by the Chair of the Economic and Social Council in that regard. On UN-Women, he cited resolution 64/289 (2010) which outlined the universal coverage of its work, noting that the presence of UN-Women in a country could only be done with the Government's permission. For its part, the Russian Federation had tried to develop programmes for achieving a work/life balance. Women represented 36 per cent of agricultural jobs and, in

terms of political leadership, women headed some of the highest posts in Government, including the third-highest post in the upper chamber of Parliament. Also, the Ministry of Public Health was headed by a woman.

KYAW THU NYEIN (Myanmar), associating with the statements made by Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Group of 77 and China, said that throughout his country's history, gender equality had never been a "big issue", since Myanmar women traditionally enjoyed a high degree of equal rights with men, and the country's constitution guaranteed that no citizen would be subject to gender discrimination. Since acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997, Myanmar had also implemented a series of national plans for the advancement of women. The cause was, therefore gaining momentum not only in line with the sound foundation of the historical and cultural traditions of the country, but also with international norms and practice. As Myanmar continued to undergo its rapid democratic transition, it would redouble its efforts to work more actively for the advancement of women, in close cooperation with the international community, from which Myanmar looked forward to receiving more assistance.

He also noted that women's participation in his country's political process, governance, and in the private and public sectors had grown. In particular, with the emergence of a multi-party democratic system in Myanmar, there had been "remarkable and significant" progress in women's participation in the political system. The number of women parliamentarians had increased, and for the first time in the country's modern history, a woman had been appointed as cabinet minister. Against that background, the Government of Myanmar was giving greater priority to enhancing the role of women through the implementation of a ten-year national strategic plan. Girls, he added, as the "custodians of family wealth and tradition", occupied an important place and were included in such plans.

SAMIRA ABUBAKAR (Libya) said women in her country had endeavoured to be active players who contributed to their society; they had been present at the revolution of 12 February against the dictator Qaddafi and were also taking part in current democracy efforts, making up around 16.5 per cent of the 200 member newly-elected national parliament. That was considered to be a positive landmark in the political development of Libyan women. Libya also applauded the efforts of UN-Women to empower women in all aspects of life, and expressed hope that women would be represented even more in leadership positions at the United Nations.

Discrimination against women in all its forms was a blatant violation of their rights;

Libya expressed condemnation of all forms of violence against women, which had affected those at all social levels, ethnicities and religions. Further, it rejected the argument that some religions permitted domestic abuse. All religions called for compassion and rejection of violence. Libya also condemned trafficking, and supported the recommendations of the Secretary-General to implement laws to address it as a transnational criminal problem. Concluding, she said Libya was also concerned about the gross violations of the rights of Palestinian women at the hands of the Israeli occupation forces.

Ms. VELICHKO (Belarus) said international efforts towards gender equality and woman's advancement had been insufficient. Resolutions must not remain words on paper, but rather be put into practice. She lauded UN-women's catalyzing role in advancing women's rights and in the development of resolutions on that issue for use at national, regional and international levels. She looked forward to UN-Women working in Belarus. In line with the United Nations interagency expert group on gender and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Belarus had attained Goal 3 on gender equality and improving women's opportunities. The labour code focused on women in the workplace. Other measures ensured women had access to employment through jobs markets and training programmes for unemployed women. There were also entrepreneurship programmes.

Violence against women was widespread in Belarus, she said, noting the Government's attention to that issue. UNFPA had provided technical assistance to strengthen Belarus' national capacity to prevent and combat domestic violence. For its part, Belarus was preparing a draft law on preventing domestic violence. Centres also had been created to assist victims in urgent need of psychological assistance equipped with special phone lines. In closing, she said gender equality and women's advancement must feature prominently in the post-2015 development agenda.

Ms. AL JASSMI (United Arab Emirates) said her country was a member of the Arab Group and working to eliminate all forms of violence against women around the world. The United Arab Emirates was proud of its efforts towards women's advancement in the social and political domains, and within the framework of the General Assembly special session. It had adopted policies to guarantee income sources for women. The Government had guaranteed free and universal education for all. Moreover, it had one of highest percentages of women who had earned higher degrees, which would help the country end discrimination at the secondary level.

In the area of public health, she said the United Arab Emirates had improved

social services. Infant mortality had dropped. Women's life expectancy had increased to 78 years, versus 75.15 for men, and maternal mortality had fallen to 0.1 deaths per 100,000 women. As for women's empowerment, she said women made up an "important percentage" of job holders. In politics, women held four ministerial posts and a large number of women were ambassadors and diplomats. The constitution provided for gender equality, and a number of mechanisms ensured her Government's adherence to international conventions on women. Finally, she said the United Arab Emirates had cooperated at the international level in the fight against trafficking in women.

Mr. DE LEON (Cuba) said a great deal needed to be done for the advancement of women, and the feminization of poverty throughout the world continued to be a great concern. Developing countries continued to face obstacles, such as decreases in aid, increases in debt, and the impact of climate change, which had a disproportionate effect on women and girls. To eliminate gender inequality, the world community must first end imbalances in trade and distribution of wealth. Sustainable advancement cannot be achieved without a fair and equitable international order.

The economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed against Cuba by the United States Government for more than five decades constituted a genocide and was the biggest impediment to the development of women and children in the country, he said. Cuba had worked very hard for gender equality and women's empowerment long before the Beijing Platform and Millennium Development Goals; Cuban women had a life expectancy at birth of 80 years, made up 67 per cent of the college graduates and 56 per cent of all judges in the country. Women also held 70 per cent of the positions in the Government and 43.32 per cent of positions in parliament. It was not satisfied with those achievements and would continue to work towards gender equality.

HASSAN EL MKHANTAR (Morocco) said the advancement of women was a subject his country gave the utmost importance, and it had put in place judicial and institutional reforms in line with international instruments. Reports of the Secretary-General indicated progress had been made, but a great deal remained to be done to empower women and girls. Much depended on the political will and partnerships between Government, police, ministries of justice and health and civil society to change opinions.

Women could play an important role in peacebuilding and national reconstruction; at the same time, protecting girls and women in conflict situations was crucial. Morocco had enacted a draft amendment that criminalized all violence against women, and had last year completed legal steps to provide direct

assistance in 2011 to widows and other vulnerable women. Measures taken by Morocco were not just in the area of law; it also engaged in awareness raising in education and human rights, which should play a large role in the advancement of women.

JANNE TAALAS (Finland), aligning with the European Union, said violence against women was a serious challenge, as it occurred everywhere, regardless of age, social standing, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation. All too often the threat or use of violence was directed against women human rights defenders, who also deserved special attention. For its part, Finland had systematically worked to end such abuse, notably through a five-year action plan that aimed to tackle violence proactively by influencing behaviour related to gender-based violence. In May 2011, Finland signed the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Abuse.

Women's limited or lack of access to justice was another area that required increased efforts, she said, stressing that women's access to both resources and influence in politics, public services and the economic sector must be secured in order to achieve true gender equality. She was pleased that the outcome to the General Assembly's 24 September High-level meeting on the rule of law recognized the right to equal access to justice for all. On other matters, she said access to quality, comprehensive reproductive health information, education and care was crucial. People younger than 25 years old constituted almost half of the world's population and it was critical to ensure they were able to make informed decisions on when and whether to have children.

LIRON ZASLANSKY (Israel) said gender equality was enshrined in Israel's 1948 Declaration of Independence and the 1951 Equal Rights for Women Law, while Israel was the third country in the world to be led by a female prime minister, Golda Meir. The Israeli Parliament's Law on Gender Implication in Legislation mandated that all bills were reviewed from a gender perspective before adoption. Israel continued to fully support the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, and its subsequent resolutions. Israel welcomed the deployment of gender advisers and the routine inclusion of provisions in peacekeeping mandates that protected women and girls from sexual violence. It was the duty of each entity of the United Nations to fully integrate a gender perspective into all issues under their consideration.

Israel strongly supported the work of UN-Women in promoting gender mainstreaming through the United Nations system and welcomed its expanding presence in the field, she said. Non-governmental organizations were crucial vehicles for expanding efforts to empower women around the world. Noting that

policy changes would improve women's present condition, she said education would help create shifts in attitudes to ensure women's equal status in the future. For example, MASHAV, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation, had conducted numerous education programmes for women. Since 1961, its Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre had trained more than 17,500 women from more than 150 countries in community development, early childhood education and the management of micro-enterprises. Israel recognized the link between empowering women and ending violence against them and welcomed the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report "Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women", document A/67/220. The empowerment of women and girls had to be part of the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

JAIME HERMIDA (Nicaragua), aligning with the Group of 77 and China and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, said her Government was committed to the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Detailing national efforts, she said illiteracy had dropped and social security services had increased, due in part to the national human development plan, which also promoted women's employment. Food security and food production programmes also contained a focus on rural women. Despite the global recession, Nicaragua had retained all its social services, thanks to public policies and solidarity of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA).

Highlighting some gains, she said the right to health was embodied in the national health plan. The comprehensive law on violence against women, and reform of the penal code aimed to fight against such abuse and encourage a life free of violence. As for women's participation, she said law 648 on equal rights and opportunities guaranteed women 50 per cent participation in public positions. In elections to be held on 4 November, more than 900 candidates would be vying for mayoralties, 450 of whom were women. Further, 42 per cent of the National Assembly seats were held by women, 18.5 per cent higher than in the 2007-2011 period. Other programmes – such as "Zero Usury" – demystified the idea that only men could obtain micro-credit loans.

Right of Reply

Exercising his right of reply, Japan's delegate recognized that the issue of comfort women was a grave affront to the dignity of a large number of women and his Government had extended an apology to them. The issue of reparations, property and claims concerning World War II had been legally settled. In 1995,

Japan and its people jointly established the Asian Women's Fund to support former comfort women. Japan had extended its maximum support to the Fund's activities, including through provision of atonement money.

The representative of the Republic of Korea said his Government was deeply concerned that Japan continued to deny its legal obligations to former comfort women, ignoring repeated international calls to address the matter in a sincere manner. Japan's actions constituted war crimes under international humanitarian law, and might constitute crimes against humanity. The issue of comfort women had not been addressed in the settlement of property and claims, nor by the agreement governing it.

In that context, he drew attention to the 1996 and 1998 reports by, respectively, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, and the Special Rapporteur on the issue of systematic rape, sexual slavery, and slavery-like practices in armed conflict, who said that neither the San Francisco Treaty nor subsequent treaties covered those practices. They had recommended that Japan compensate victims. Other recommendations, including by the Committee against Torture in 2007, the Human Rights Committee in 2008, and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2009, reaffirmed that the issue of comfort women remained unresolved. He called on Japan to recognize its legal responsibility and take measures appropriate to the victims.

Japan's delegate said he would not make a detailed rebuttal. Japan's position was as previously stated.

The representative of the Republic of Korea recalled recommendations by Special Rapporteurs and by the human rights treaty bodies. The issue could be addressed only through Japan's acceptance of its legal responsibility, in line with those various human rights mechanisms.