

### **THIRD COMMITTEE DEBATE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS CRITICAL TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY, GOAL THAT SHOULD RECEIVE WIDE GLOBAL SUPPORT, SAYS GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT**

#### **Chair Says Focus on Gender Equality Could Have Strong Spillover to Other Areas; Committee Hears from Some 56 Speakers on Second Day of Women's Advancement Debate**

Today's debate on women's rights and perspectives was critical for achieving gender equality, a goal that should receive wide support in all corners of the world, General Assembly President Vuc Jeremić told the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) today, pledging his readiness to engage with delegates on all such issues during the sixty-seventh session.

In his first address to the Committee, Mr. Jeremić also encouraged delegates to work with the Second Committee (Economic and Financial) on issues that fell under their joint purview. That, in turn, would complement — and revitalize — the work of the General Assembly plenary.

A strong focus on Millennium Development Goal 3 — achieving gender equality — was one such issue, said Third Committee Chair Henry L. Mac-Donald (Suriname). Attention to that issue would have a strong positive spillover into other important areas, including employment, as States, the United Nations and other stakeholders hammered out the post-2015 development agenda.

Throughout the day, delegates decried women's untapped potential — particularly in the economic domain — as one of “humanity's great losses”. Discrimination against women and girls — including gender-based violence, economic discrimination, reproductive health inequities and harmful traditional practices — was the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. Other “enormous” challenges compounded their situation: the feminization of poverty, an increase in single-parent families headed by women due to the migration of men to cities, and poor supply of basic social services like education and reproductive health.

“The persistence of inequalities between men and women have proved a major hindrance to women's full participation in all spheres of society,” especially their involvement in politics, decision making and access to resources, said the representative of the Maldives. Citing one example, she said the modernization of the fishing industry limited women's traditional role in drying and processing fish, as fishermen now sold their catch directly to buyers and centralized industries.

Labour market disparities were also apparent in Colombia, that country's delegate said, where women's unemployment was nearly double that of men and their salary was 20 per cent lower for equal work. Maternal mortality was also on the rise.

Almost all of the day's 56 speakers said empowered women contributed to the health and productivity of families and communities, as well as improved prospects for the next generation. Increasing the number of employed women would reduce poverty, boost economic output and improve health and education outcomes measured by the Millennium Development Goals. In politics, women's voices would ensure the creation of more inclusive, equitable societies. In that vein, many speakers detailed changes to their legal frameworks to promote gender equality by incorporating relevant provisions into their constitutions and enacting gender equality laws.

Delegates from Peru, Chile and Panama detailed efforts to incorporate the fight against femicide — the killing of women — into national legislation. Panama's delegate, in particular, cited three laws to that effect, two of which defined femicide in the criminal code and penalized it as violence against women.

Other speakers outlined reforms to land tenure rules. Angola's delegate said the Council of Ministers had approved a land law which guaranteed rural women's access and control of land either by acquisition or inheritance, a significant step for rural women, who represented 53.5 per cent of the rural population. They were responsible for about 80 per cent of the agricultural production, 90 per cent of basic products, 100 per cent of the processing of those products and 90 per cent of their marketing.

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry for the Promotion of Women of Burkina Faso said her country had improved women's access to land with the adoption of a rural land ownership policy that allowed women to acquire manufacturing and processing equipment.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Liberia, Senegal, Iran, Japan, Algeria, Kenya, Pakistan, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Thailand, Syria, Kuwait, Ukraine, Mongolia, Iraq, Indonesia, Tunisia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Turkey, Sudan, Lesotho, Kyrgyzstan, Yemen, Jamaica, South Africa, Kazakhstan, India, Zimbabwe, Qatar, Marshall Islands, Iceland, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Angola, Botswana, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Costa Rica, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

A representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine also spoke.

The representatives of Israel and Syria spoke in exercise of the right of reply.

The Committee will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 17 October, to continue and conclude its discussion on the advancement of women. It was also expected to take up the rights of children.

### Background

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) met today to continue its discussion on the advancement of women. For background information, see Press Release [GA/SHC/4040](#) of 15 October.

### General Assembly President Statement

Addressing the Third Committee for the first time, General Assembly President VUK JEREMIĆ said the Committee played a crucial role on humanitarian and human rights matters and he wanted to deliver a message of full support and encouragement as it took up its work in the sixty-seventh session.

“We have an important year ahead,” he said, noting that the Committee had a “particularly hectic” agenda. He encouraged focus on achieving the widest possible consensus. Today’s debate on women’s rights and perspectives was critical for achieving gender equality, a topic that should receive support in all corners of the world. Hailing the work of all United Nations entities, and in particular the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), he underlined the role of the Human Rights Council, emphasizing it was imperative for its work to be solidly grounded in the principles underpinning the outcome of the World Conference on Human Rights.

“The Council’s work must evolve to deal with contemporary challenges and changing circumstances in the world,” he said, stressing the importance of the Special Procedure mandate holders and Special Rapporteurs in that regard. Work must also continue to strengthen the human rights treaty bodies, improving their impact on rights holders and duty bearers, while respecting State sovereignty.

As for the Third Committee, he called for upholding a constructive atmosphere to contribute to consensus-building and he looked forward to seeing progress made in the work ahead. He understood that the session had started in a constructive

manner and that obstacles had been resolved. He encouraged the Committee to work with the Second Committee (Economic and Financial) on issues that fell under their joint purview, which, in turn, would complement — and revitalize — the work of General Assembly plenary.

He was aware there were a number of contested issues to be taken up by the Third Committee, including country specific situations, the death penalty, issues related to Palestine and discussion on religious defamation and intolerance, the last of which was particularly sensitive. “I believe freedom of speech is a sacrosanct human right and it should be supported,” he said. “But it is abused, and can result in hate speech”. At times, it was even meant to result in hate speech, as everyone had seen in recent, blasphemous insults to religious figures.

“I believe this is something we must condemn in the harshest terms possible,” he insisted. It was an abuse of free of speech and the General Assembly should take action. He urged the Third Committee to send a strong political and moral message that hate speech in any form must not be tolerated. In that regard, he hoped that existing differences would be overcome, as the Committee could not send a strong political message with a slim majority. Effort and hard work were needed to formulate a belief that was supported by a strong and wide majority.

That message was needed in the world and in the United Nations. He appreciated the sensitivities of various parties surrounding that issue, but at the end of the day, the Third Committee had the chance to exercise leadership in the General Assembly. He stood ready to engage with delegates on any issues to be taken up in the sixty-seventh session.

HENRY L. MAC-DONALD (Suriname), Chair of the Third Committee, fully agreed on the need to condemn every kind of hate speech: cultural and religious freedom, tolerance and cooperation should be goals promoted by the United Nations. “If there is one institution where we must be strong on hate speech, it most certainly would have to be the United Nations”.

He also appreciated the need to share work with the Second Committee, especially in the run-up to 2015. The time had come to focus strongly on those issues, as there would be a positive spillover from strong attention to Goal 3 (gender equality).

## Statements

GAIL FARNGALO (Liberia) said her country had been in the situation of seeing rape used as a weapon, and as a result it had been an imperative for Liberia to develop legislation and institutional frameworks to alleviate that threat to women and girls during and after conflict. For the past six years, Liberia's rape law had been in effect, carrying a staunch penalty of 10 years for the offense of non-consensual sexual intercourse. A special court established in 2008 tries cases of sexual violence, while capacities in the ministries of Justice and Gender Development were strengthened. Specialized sexual and gender-based violence units would be deployed to all of Liberia's 15 counties by 2014, while a domestic violence act was being developed to address a problem that was "increasingly becoming pervasive".

This year's statistics on gender-based violence in Liberia were alarming, with statutory rape accounting for 49.2 per cent of the offenses against women. Regrettably, there had only been a slight decrease in the occurrence of rape compared to the previous year, although there had been improvement in the quality of statistics and reporting. "The availability of services to survivors is creating an environment whereby women are becoming more comfortable in reporting offenses and being empowered to seek assistance," she said. Liberia was continuing to integrate women's concerns in all national policies, but programmes were hampered by inadequate human resource capacity, limited financial and budgetary resources, inefficient enforcement of policies and the lack of data and coordination. "Nonetheless, the commitment and political will provide the impetus and persistence to succeed," she said.

FATOU ISIDORA MARA NIANG (Senegal) said with two years to go to the Millennium Development Goals target date, it was sad to note that Goal 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment was falling short, despite much progress. Senegal, like the international community, placed great importance on gender equality, sharing the belief of Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN-Women, that the "untapped potential of women remained one of the great losses for the whole of humanity". Aware that women were undoubtedly a force for durable economic development, the Senegalese Government had mainstreamed gender development in all of its programmes. In that approach, the focus had been made on the situation of women in rural areas, who represented a large part of the population.

The political response for equal rights for men and women had also been carried out judicially and institutionally, she said. The Government of Senegal had ratified all relevant international instruments, including laws on equality in functions of parliament, access to land, and free medical care during labour or caesarean section, putting in place the Maputo Plan of Action and the creation of

a national fund of credit for women to access microcredit. This year, 1,800 women would receive loans to the tune of 900,800,000 African francs, she said.

OCTAVIO ERRÁZURIZ (Chile), aligning with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said women's full inclusion and gender equity were crucial for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which was why Chile had participated with Portugal in a panel focused on integrating women's rights throughout the United Nations system. In 1980, Chile had signed the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. In 1991, the National Service for Women (SERNAM) was created with ministerial rank to adopt policies and programmes in the field for non-discrimination against women. Chile also supported the work of UN-Women.

Detailing progress, he said Chile's fifth and sixth combined report was discussed last week by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Chile also had undertaken legal reforms and actions to create gender equality, including a law that protected the right to equal pay that also extended parental postnatal leave from 12 to 24 weeks. Chile had promoted the creation of a Presidential Advisory Committee on Women, Work and Motherhood, to ensure the best care for children and provide a better balance between family and work. In education, primary education coverage had reached 100 per cent and secondary education coverage had reached 90 per cent. In the area of health, he cited a programme allowing free access to 60 health clinics. As for political participation, further progress was needed. To combat violence against women, the 2010 entry into force of a femicide law had increased the penalties for that crime, while the "Chile Cares" programme assisted victims and implemented early warning mechanism for domestic violence.

NÉSTOR OSORIO (Colombia) aligning with CELAC, welcomed the Secretary-General's recommendations to intensify efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and lauded UN-Women in that regard. One of Colombia's priorities had been the national public policy on gender equity, the broad outlines of which were presented last August, in the presence of the UN-Women Executive Director. Those guidelines had resulted from extensive dialogue with national and local bodies, as well as with civil organizations, represented by the Presidential Advisory for the Equity of Women. Throughout that process, international technical and financial assistance from UN-Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), among others, had been crucial.

He went on to say that Colombia had formalized a policy for women to ensure a life free from violence. In education, there was no significant difference in literacy

rates, access to higher education and graduation rates. There were, however, disparities in the labour market. Women's unemployment was almost double that of men, and their salary was 20 per cent lower than men's for equal work. Maternal mortality also had risen from last year, one reason the Government had set up gender offices in ministries that aimed to include a gender perspective in local and national programmes. Colombia had promoted remote working for women with disabilities, women heads of household and female reintegrated combatants, all of whom had been provided credit to overcome extreme poverty in rural areas. Finally, he said Colombia was implementing the gender equity certificate programme, which awarded companies with a gender equity a seal if they had provided true labour equality for men and women. To eradicate violence against women, Colombia had amended penal codes and trained civil servants to provide care for victims.

FOROUZANDEH VADIATI (Iran) said the defining principles and objectives of UN-Women to empower women should come from a family-based approach and respect for divine values, with attention to national, cultural and religious customs of every nation. To that end, Iran had established a High-Level Headquarters on the Family, based on Article 10 of its Constitution. Also, the final document of the sixteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, recently held in Iran, reiterated the Movement's commitment to implementing the outcome document of the Fourth World Conference on Women, resolved to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, and recognized the central role of UN-Women in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment within the United Nations system.

Persistent growth in the trafficking of women and girls raised serious concerns for all nations, she said, encouraging destination countries to increase efforts to combat and prevent it and to provide protection to victims. Prevention should be a core component of any strategy to end violence against women. In Iran, a task force had been mandated to evaluate the drafting of a bill against domestic violence. Women's issues were a priority for Iran and needed to be mainstreamed across all sectors and policy processes. Continuous efforts had been made to that end, among them a gender perspective in budgeting to ensure adequate resources to achieve women's empowerment. She also noted women's presence in many professions in Iran, including at the highest levels of government.

Commending UN-Women for leading the Organization's efforts on gender issues, YAEKO SUMI (Japan) said Japan would continue to be actively engaged on women's issues as a member of UN-Women's Executive Board. Japan had given great importance to the equal participation of both women and men

throughout the recovery process since the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. Based on that experience, it had submitted a resolution on “Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Natural Disasters” to the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Recognizing that promoting the socioeconomic empowerment of women was indispensable to the recovery process, Japan adopted an Action Plan on Economic Revival through the Promotion of the Empowerment of Women. That Action Plan included three pillars: raising the awareness of men; implementing drastic positive actions; and encouraging civil servants to help lead those efforts.

As part of its effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including gender-related issues, by 2015, Japan had provided educational assistance of \$3.5 billion and health-care assistance of \$5 million over a five-year period that began in 2011, she said. Together with other partners, for example, Japan aimed to save the lives of 430,000 pregnant women through a maternal health support programme called “EMBRACE”. In addition, Japan had funded several projects through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security to protect women and vulnerable individuals. She believed the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security was one of the most crucial issues confronting the international community and she hoped the indicators set by the Secretary-General would be utilized globally and at the country level in a timely manner.

KAMEL CHIR (Algeria) said the scale of challenges for the advancement of women was exacerbated by the ongoing financial and food crises, which particularly affected women in rural areas. The Algerian Government had endeavoured to reform the national legal framework to place protection and promotion of the rights of women at the heart of the goals and strategic programmes. A series of laws had eliminated all discriminatory provisions, including the amendment of the family code in 2005 with the view of creating equality and equilibrium in family relations and parental responsibilities. The nationality code was also changed to provide citizenship to children born of an Algerian mother, and Algeria had also withdrawn its reservations on article 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

On political participation of women in Algeria, he said the country had adopted a law this year on political parties, which fixed a system of 30 per cent quotas for women so they could have better elected representation in the National Assembly. The results of that reform could be seen in the 10 May elections of this year, in which 146 women were elected, as opposed to only 31 in the previous mandate. Elected women in the National Assembly now accounted for 31 per cent, rather than 7 per cent in the outgoing parliament. The fundamental



educational policy of the country also guaranteed the right to education, and in 2010 97.34 per cent of girls were enrolled in primary school. When it came to higher education, the enrolment and graduation rate of women had exceeded men for a number of years. Meanwhile, female employment had made great progress in the public sector, with women accounting for 50 per cent of teachers and 53 per cent of doctors; in the courts, 38 per cent of judges were women.

SOMAIA BARGHOUTI, a representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, said the current situation of Palestinian women, as documented by various reports and studies of the United Nations and global organizations, was critical and tragic, particularly in Gaza and the many refugee camps where generations of Palestinians had been forced to live. That was mainly due to Israel's continued military occupation and escalation of oppressive policies and measures. Israel's occupation, discrimination, destruction and systematic human rights violations had gravely impacted Palestinian women's socioeconomic and psychological well-being. Israel's illegal policies, among them settlement construction, increased home demolitions, severe restrictions on movements of persons and goods through the use of checkpoints, widespread destruction of Palestinian property and agricultural fields and the gross violation of almost every single human right, had continued to have "deathlike ramifications" on Palestinian women's advancement, empowerment, survival and well-being.

More than 20 per cent of the total Palestinian population, over 800,000 people, had been detained in Israeli jails and detention centres at one time or another since 1967, she said. Although most prisoners were men, women bore the social and financial cost of having to care for their families in the father's, husband's or brother's absence. Palestinian women endured domestic violence caused by high poverty and unemployment and feelings of despair among the male population. They also were subjected to political violence from the occupying forces and the hundreds of thousands of illegal extremist settlers. Nevertheless, Palestinian women continued to make tremendous efforts towards advancement and empowerment. In January 2011, the Palestinian Authority had adopted a national anti-violence strategy for 2011-2019. Created by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in cooperation with UN Women, the programme aimed to provide job training, empowerment programmes, social support and a legal framework to stem violence. It recognized violence against women as a development issue affecting Palestinian political, social and economic systems. Palestinian women remained relentless in their noble struggle to end the occupation and create their own independent State, which was necessary to achieve true empowerment. But to achieve that goal, the United Nations must redouble its efforts to help them.

JOSEPHINE OJIAMBO (Kenya), aligning with the “Group of 77” developing countries and China, as well as the African Group, said the State bore the primary duty to ensure that women and girls were secure and had the right tools to succeed. On the seemingly intractable problem of trafficking in women and girls, she said: “the work is cut out for us.” The social, economic, and emotional consequences of trafficking were unacceptably high. The action plan adopted by the Committee two years ago to combat such abuse was a major step forward, but its implementation was still a challenge. “It’s high time for a policy rethink,” she said, urging a review of how best to ensure coherent inter-agency collaboration to reduce trafficking, especially in source and destination countries. The issue needed policy leadership by the United Nations.

For its part, Kenya had recently passed anti-trafficking legislation to improve prevention and victim protection. “We have to make trafficking a less attractive undertaking by making the consequences unbearable,” she said, as traffickers were not deterred by lax punishments. As for violence against women, she said a major factor contributing to inaction by the victim was the fact that the victims often knew their perpetrators. She urged a targeted plan to reduce violence in the home. Whether the aim was to reduce trafficking or violence, legislation and plans of action could only go so far. “We need resources,” she said, to educate target populations, strengthen police and prosecution, build shelters, provide alternative choices to trafficking victims and strengthen criminal justice systems. The “catastrophic” failure of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women was a major setback.

ZAHEER A. JANJUA (Pakistan) said his country’s vision for women’s empowerment was guided by the words of its founding father, Quaid-e-Asam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who said: “No nation could ever be worthy of its existence that could not take its women along with the men and no struggle could ever succeed without women participating side by side with men.” Pakistan’s Constitution guaranteed full participation of women in all spheres of national life; to empower women, the Government had taken various steps to promote their political, economic, social and cultural rights. “Pakistan not only had the honour of having the first ever woman Prime Minister of the Muslim world, but also has the distinction of having the first ever woman Speaker of the National Assembly in the entire Islamic World,” noting that women now comprised 22.2 per cent of the National Assembly and 17 per cent of the Senate membership and held important cabinet positions.

Despite its efforts, gender inequality remained a big challenge to socioeconomic development in Pakistan, especially in rural areas. “Though the National Commission for Human Development has helped impart functional literacy to

over 2 million women in rural areas, female literacy rate remains around 45 per cent, with 70 per cent in urban and 40 per cent in rural areas,” he said. Sustained international cooperation and global partnerships were of vital importance; the international community should honour its official development assistance commitments, do more for debt relief and ensure the opening of markets. Increased development assistance in areas such as women’s education, health, and job creating were essential for eliminating gender disparities.

HÉCTOR VIRGILIO ALCÁNTARA (Dominican Republic), aligning with the Group of 77 and China, as well as CELAC, detailed various policies to advance women and abolish gender-based discrimination. The national plan for gender equity (2007-2017) was based on three pillars: gender equality from a human rights approach, a high-impact and targeted pilot project and institutional mechanisms to coordinate implementation. The national development strategy (2010-2030) included gender as a cross-cutting issue, while the national strategic plan for the health sector (2012-2017) aimed to promote gender as a cross-cutting issue. Another strategy aimed to strengthen national and local mechanisms to reduce teen pregnancy, while the gender strategic plan of the Labour Ministry (2009-2013) aimed to promote gender equity in the ministry’s work. In terms of women’s political participation, he said there were 38 female deputies, representing 20.8 per cent in the lower chamber.

He said success had been seen in the election of a woman — for the second time — as Vice-President in May 2012. The first time a woman occupied that post was in 2000-2004. Moreover, the President, in his 16 August inauguration speech, made several commitments to women, pledging to develop a national system for technical training, to ensure that women and youth were more employable, to make education a “social equalizer”, and to apply gender equity as a cross-cutting issue in all public policies. Further, he created the “Vive Mujer” programme to provide care for violence victims and increased the number of counselling centres for aggressive men. The Dominican Republic welcomed the transparent work carried out by the Executive Director of UN-Women, especially in implementing the 2011-2013 strategic plan and in the creation of the new regional architecture. He urged increased contributions to the fund that allowed UN-Women to carry out its work.

ANDRÉS FIALLO (Ecuador) said that since the Beijing Conference, his country had made great strides in the promotion and protection of the rights of women. In the past five years, Ecuador had designed and implemented plans to eradicate gender-based violence against women and children through a multi-sectoral approach. It would not have seen that progress without the input of indigenous

peoples in the country, and the delegation underscored that a number of important steps for indigenous women were still needed.

Ecuador's first national survey on the rights of women had provided valuable data for better implementation of policies, but it had also illustrated a disturbing social-cultural problem of violence, and much remained to be done in the country for gender equality and the empowerment of women. He noted that there had been some encouraging advances in his country, including, over the past four years, having two female Ministers of Foreign Affairs and one female Minister of Defence. He also expressed thanks for the support the country had received from Michelle Bachelet, who had visited Ecuador last June to further promote the empowerment of women.

PRATANA UDOMMONGKOLKUL (Thailand) said that the number of women occupying senior positions in the public and private sectors was on the rise, with women emerging as world and national leaders, further broadening the economic and social space for women. The role of women in the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and development could not be underestimated. In Thailand, too, women's political participation had expanded. Women comprised one fourth of both houses in Thailand and the first female Prime Minister also chaired the National Committee on the Policy and Strategy for the Advancement of Women. Among measures taken to realize equal rights for women was the country's recent withdrawal of its reservation on Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Yet, some women still became victims of violence and trafficking, she said. They needed quality education, healthcare coverage, equal socio-economic opportunities and vocational training. In Thailand, victims of trafficking and violence were offered such assistance. Thai trafficking victims overseas were provided a safe and secure return via a process of nationality confirmation. A One Stop Crisis Centre had been established in hospitals to provide immediate comprehensive services for victims of violence and Government agencies were working together to suppress all forms of abuse. The rights of female prisoners were also protected. A fund had been set up to complement the Thai Women's Development Plan and a National Economic and Social Development Plan sought to enhance women's economic independence.

MONIA ALSALEH (Syria), associating with the Group of 77 and China, said Syria had tried to create a qualitative improvement in women's lives through comprehensive reform - supported by strong political will and launched to achieve a more just society. Women were in various administrative, judicial and military leadership positions. Syrian women had achieved the right to vote in 1923, the

same year the first Syrian female doctor had graduated from the University of Damascus. A woman also had been Vice President. Indeed, Syria had been a pioneer in providing all requirements for women's empowerment and safeguarding equal rights. The State provided all opportunities for women to contribute fully, especially in social and cultural life. Moreover, gender equality was provided in the public and private sectors, she said, citing rules for equal pay for both sexes. Unfortunately, due to the incidents her country was facing today, armed terrorists, supported by Arab regional and international parties, were "forcing Syria to lag behind".

Indeed, armed groups embracing Salafist and Wahabi ideologies had adversely affected all aspects of life, especially for women and girls. "Girls fear going to their schools and universities," she said, lamenting also that Syrian female refugees were being exploited, offered marriage by people in other countries on the premise they were being rescued from their situations. It was "sexual jihad" in return for trivial amounts of money. Sexual crimes by those in charge of refugee camps violated international human rights instruments. Syria had reported those abuses to the United Nations and the media. She pressed the Secretary-General to include in his reports the suffering of Syrian women in the Occupied Syrian Golan. Syria offered scholarships to Syrian universities to those women and worked to provide them with housing and decent work. Finally, she said illegal unilateral economic sanctions undermined social development and human rights.

Mr. AL-MASHAN (Kuwait) said his country supported the recommendations to address violence against women through a framework honouring and protecting the rights of women and girls. To overcome obstacles for the development of women, the global community should also work towards clear goals and indicators to guarantee follow-up and coordination of all stakeholders. Kuwait had included family courts in its development plan, with a view toward adopting a law on the family, and it had also developed institutional follow-up mechanism for the goals to promote the empowerment of women.

Kuwaiti women continued to be the key partner to men in their role in the family and for future generations through activities in all spheres of life, he said. Thanks to tireless efforts, they had been established as a key component in all spheres. One of the main stages in the approach to Kuwaiti women was the decision of the Kuwaiti council to open positions the prosecutor's office to them. Kuwait had also ratified many international conventions and protocols on the protection of women, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. In conclusion, he called on the international community to cooperate in the promotion of women.

YANA BOIKO (Ukraine), aligning with the statement made on behalf of the European Union, stated that gender equality was firmly anchored in Ukraine's legislation, which included a 2005 law on ensuring equal rights for women and men, an institutional mechanism on gender equality and a special representative in the Office of the Parliament's Commissioner for Human Rights. Within the legal framework, Ukraine had complied with its responsibilities under the provisions of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Despite visible achievements, it was also necessary to do more to enhance the role of women in political and economic decision-making, in particular by balancing gender representation in high legislative and executive positions. To that end, a draft law had been submitted for parliamentary consideration.

Condemning all forms of inequality and discrimination related to violence against women, she added that in 2010 Ukraine had ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and in 2011, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Efforts were underway to bring the national legislation into conformity with those Conventions. Further, Ukraine also emphasized the need to strengthen the rights of women in rural areas and women migrant workers.

GANKHUURAI BATTUNGALAG (Mongolia), associating herself with the Group of 77 and China, said that the establishment of UN-Women had been a "landmark", and her delegation had decided to make financial contributions to the operational activities of that entity on an annual basis. The advancement of women, promotion of gender equality and women's participation in decision-making were integral parts of Mongolia's national development agenda. Recently, its Parliament had adopted the Gender Equality Law, which required up to 40 per cent of public service positions, including decision-making posts, to be made available to women. Meanwhile, a new electoral law, adopted earlier this year, imposed quotas on political parties to have female candidates. Major progress had been seen in the implementation of those regulations, tripling the number of female Members of Parliament as a result of the parliamentary election held last June. The number of female members of the Cabinet had also increased.

Mongolia also attached great importance to the economic empowerment of women, she said. Its main focus in that area was to extend support through household development and the promotion of small- and medium-sized production. In 2011, the Government had allocated \$300 million for soft loans to small- and medium-sized businesses, and 70 per cent of them were run by

women entrepreneurs. In addition, she said, Mongolia believed that rural women were critical agents in poverty reduction, food security and environmental sustainability. During the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, therefore, the country had organized a side event on “Rural women: are we delivering our commitments?”, during which twenty rural women from different parts of Mongolia had shared their first-hand experiences, and stakeholders had exchanged views on what had been done, and what remained to be delivered, in the framework of internationally agreed development goals. Such deliberations should be further promoted, she stressed.

YASSIN DAHAM (Iraq), aligning with the Arab Group, as well as the Group of 77 and China, said his country had seen a growing number of feminist organizations and movements, as well as the impact of women at the local and national political level. Noting the importance of the 1995 Beijing Conference, he said discrimination still hampered women’s participation in political life. Since 2003, Iraq had tried to find an approach to ensure gender equality in the political domain, as seen in efforts to grant women 25 per cent of parliamentary seats. Women also held senior posts in Governments, including ministries, while the Government had reviewed all legislation to abolish discriminatory laws.

In other areas, she said, Iraq had provided women heads of family, divorcees and widows with resources, ensured gender equality in teaching, and had created a community police force to eliminate violence against women and children. It also adopted a human trafficking law in 2012. Prosecutorial guarantees existed to ensure human rights, pursuant to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Other gains had been made with the creation of the Women’s Affairs Ministry and the Department for Widows and Divorcees in the Ministry for Social Affairs. In the Kurdistan region, legislation had been amended to eliminate polygamy and female circumcision. The Kurdistan Constitution also ensured women’s 25 per cent representation in the local assembly.

ANDY RACHMIANTO (Indonesia), associating with the statements made by the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Group of 77 and China, said his country’s Constitution, laws and policies guaranteed women’s rights. In the area of political participation, both general election and political party laws had been revised to increase women’s representation in legislative bodies. In the area of economic development, women had benefited from facilities that increased the capacity of micro, small and medium enterprises and the expansion of a people-based small business loans programme, among others. He noted that although the average annual growth rate of women entering the labour market over the past seven years had been substantially higher than that of men,

women remained under-represented in the labour force, with higher unemployment rates. Also, even as entrepreneurs, women lacked access to capital and business advisory services. Indonesian migrant workers abroad were similarly disadvantaged. They endured poor working conditions and their range of employment opportunities was very restricted, he said, adding that the protection of women migrant workers needed to be strengthened.

To address those challenges, he said his country had recently joined a new initiative to intensify its efforts in improving the quality of life of women. Also, the national action plan continued to focus on policy reform and capacity development, as well as the monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation. Noting that society and the media would play pivotal roles in raising awareness of gender equality and children's rights, he proposed to engage in stronger advocacy on behalf of women through public awareness campaigns and support for gender-responsive media, among others.

AMIRA DALI (Tunisia) said that, despite the firm commitment by the United Nations and efforts by its special organs and Member States, it was regrettable today that women were the most affected by the problems of poverty, illiteracy and disease, not to mention violence and discrimination. The international community needed to guarantee better status for women not through treating them as victims, but as a fully fledged partner and active stakeholder in the development process. We should also admit the significant contribution of women in their role as homemakers, in order to address their galvanizing role in social development. Nothing could be undertaken today in any society without the participation of women, she said.

The Tunisian Government had been committed since the country's revolution to build on gains by women and consolidate them for an empowered, decent social and political life. It was working towards the integration of women, particularly in rural areas and had provided aid to 230,000 families. It was also important to point out that the country had a coherent strategy to eliminate violence against women, based on four pillars of data collection, improving and creating appropriate services, community outreach and applying existing laws. Empowerment of women and enjoyment of their freedom could only be conceived with full responsibility and respect for their dignity, and in that respect the treatment of Palestinian women weighed heavily on Tunisia. She paid a well-deserved tribute to Palestinian women suffering under the occupation of Israel. Palestinian mothers deserved full admiration, she said, calling for guarantees for a safer life free from oppression.

MARIE CLAIRE MILLOGO-SORGHO, Permanent Secretary, National Council for



Gender Promotion, Ministry for the Promotion of Women of Burkina Faso, aligning with the Group of 77 and China, as well as the African Group, said that since 1997, the Ministry for Women's Advancement had worked to promote women in the political and economic spheres. The national gender policy, adopted in 2009, was carried out through actions involving all stakeholders in Burkina Faso's development. The first action plan (2011-2013) of the gender policy aimed to unify the understanding of the gender concept, strengthen technical capacity, create partnerships and mobilize resources to change discriminatory behaviour. It was being led by the National Council for Gender Promotion.

Detailing other efforts, she said gender units in ministries and other public bodies ensured a gender component in all programmes and policies, adding that the 2008 creation of a permanent national forum for women allowed women to express their concerns directly to the President. Moreover, Burkina Faso had improved women's access to resources, especially land, with the adoption of a rural land ownership policy that allowed women to acquire manufacturing and processing equipment. The Government also created a fund to support training and apprenticeships for women. A national fund had been set up to promote literacy and informal education in 48 women's centres. A 2005 law on reproductive health recognized the right to improved sexual and reproductive health. Finally, she said Burkina Faso had ratified the Convention in 1984 and had worked to end discriminatory cultural practices through awareness campaigns and enhanced law enforcement. She welcomed the draft resolution submitted by the African Group to eliminate female genital mutilation, which was under the Committee's consideration, with the hope it would be adopted unanimously.

GERENGBO YAKIVU (Democratic Republic of Congo) said her delegation supported the recommendations of the Secretary-General encouraging States to take new steps in the field of gender equality, with a view of guaranteeing women full enjoyment of their human rights. Such rights were guaranteed in her country's Constitution, and a draft law on gender was currently being considered by the country's lower Parliament, while other legislation had adopted texts on the labour code on female employment and protection of children. Her country had adopted a national strategy for the integration of gender mainstreaming in projects throughout the country, and it now had a plan of action. To enhance female participation at election time, it was building the political capacities of parties and supporting female organizations at all levels.

When it came to sexual and gender-based violence, the Government was coordinating with development partners for a national strategy based on

combating impunity and protecting vulnerable persons. The establishment and maintenance of a database in the sphere of combating gender-based sexual violence was part of a holistic approach that also addressed legal assistance and legal remedies to the problem. She concluded by drawing attention to social and cultural inertia in the east of her country, where women were paying a heavy price for lack of protection against sexual violence. Full involvement of the international community was needed to put an end to that scourge, which had ravaged the country for more than a decade, she said.

ERTUĞRUL APAKAN (Turkey) commended the work of UN-Women and ensured it of Turkey's continued support. The Third Committee would deal with draft resolutions that were critical to women, including one of particular importance on intensified efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. Turkey was the first country to ratify the Council of Europe Convention for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, last year. Turkey was also pleased that a law criminalizing violence, domestic violence and violence against women — including verbal, physical, sexual, economic and psychological violence — had entered into force in March.

He hoped the Commission on the Status of Women would speak with a united, strong voice against violence against women and girls, noting that the Third Committee's work would set the tone for the Commission's deliberations. At the international level, consensus had been reached on the need to protect and promote women's rights, but emphasis on girls was relatively new, requiring more efforts from all stakeholders to be firmly established. There was a logical "process of continuity and transition" between those two phases of life, which presented opportunities to tackle global problems if such issues were addressed at an early stage. With that in mind, it would be useful to consider how to use concepts of women and girls together, rather than separately, including in United Nations' terminology. He also invited UN-Women to take the lead in raising awareness about solving the challenges faced by elderly women. In closing, he said a gender perspective must be mainstreamed in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

CARMEN ARIAS (Peru), aligning with CELAC, fully agreed on the need to ensure consistent gender mainstreaming in United Nations bodies. For its part, Peru had a constitutional and legislative framework to fight gender stereotypes, based on political, economic and social aspects. A law on equal opportunities and the national gender equality plan guided public policies to achieve gender equality. Governmental and civil society mechanisms also existed for following up on goals. With that in mind, she urged that the elimination of violence against women be part of gender equality and women's empowerment indicators in the

post-2015 development agenda. Indeed, violence against women limited economic and social advancement.

She went on to say that Peru's national programme to fight domestic and sexual violence provided care to victims, while a national plan to combat violence against women in the 2009-2015 period aimed to improve State action on that issue, in close collaboration with civil society and the private sector. In 2011, Peru incorporated the fight against femicide into its national legislation. The Government also would sponsor a resolution on the elimination of all forms of violence against women. In that context, she drew attention to "Letters by Women", a local initiative to raise awareness among Government authorities about increasing the budget for abuse victims. Finally, she said Peru participated in the Executive Board of UN-Women, which she hoped would foster respect for women's rights around the world.

MOHAMED IBRAHIM MOHAMED ELBAHI (Sudan) said the achievements in his country were the result of targeted policies adopted with care over decades since independence to guarantee gender equality. His country had long developed policies and strategies to ensure the empowerment of women, including national strategies devoted to the family, eliminating violence against women, fighting against AIDS and assistance for the elderly and persons with disabilities. Sudan's Council of Ministers in 2007 adopted a policy for women's equity, and implemented a plan of action that created administrative units for women's issues and gender-specific areas. Among its successes were a microcredit plan and a project to help women's productivity and help finance small and medium enterprises. These plans focused on rural women.

Sudan had also adopted a plan specifically for the promotion of rural women, covering such issues as financing of small rural enterprises to reduce poverty, training programmes, and raising awareness on health and nutrition. Sudan also had strategies to combat violence against women, and it had established units in its Justice Ministry and a police force at its Interior Ministry to protect families. After the rebellion in Darfur, the Government drew up a law on crimes against humanity and crimes against war. It also worked with the United Nations to create a law for the protection of women. However, he called for better protection of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation, and for lifting trade restrictions, so developing countries can build economies with more opportunities for women.

MAFIROANE MOTANYANE (Lesotho) said efforts must be redoubled towards achieving the shared objective of creating a world where women were equal citizens to men in all respects. "Women are not just the appendages of

men. They have a meaningful role to play in advancing the global agenda of consolidating international peace, economic prosperity and human social progress,” he said. “It is only when the inequalities in education and employment are eradicated that women will be in a better position to fully get involved in all the efforts aimed at fighting poverty, and to make the world a better place for all,” he said, calling for quotas to guarantee gender parity in politics.

Lesotho recognized women as equal citizens and was committed to the promotion and protection of their human rights. It had taken great strides in policy, legislation and programmatic interventions to improve the quality of life of its women. In 2010, Lesotho was ranked the number one country in sub-Saharan Africa and number eight in the world for closing the gender gap by 76.8 per cent. The Government was also working to establish a “one-stop-shop” centre to carry out a comprehensive study on violence against women, raise public awareness and establish a specialized service for victims of gender-based violence.

NURBEK KASYMOV (Kyrgyzstan) cited gains on women’s advancement, including the fact that between 2010 and 2011 his country had been headed by a woman. Today, the president of the high court, the General Prosecutor and the head of the national bank were all women. Women also headed key ministries and accounted for almost one third of parliamentary seats. Indeed, women’s movements had become part of Kyrgyzstan’s democratic process, notably through work to establish a quota for women, youth and ethnic minorities. He supported enhancing international cooperation through efforts to promote women’s and children’s rights, including for access to health services and employment opportunities. He also supported the Commission on the Status of Women, which was the main forum for following up on the Fourth World Conference on Women.

He went on to say that, since independence, Kyrgyzstan had ratified a number of instruments and assumed legally binding obligations, including to submit periodic reports to United Nations treaty bodies. At the national level, Kyrgyzstan had approved a plan to achieve gender equality in the 2012-2014 period. Also, the Government would work to expand economic and educational opportunities, as well as access to justice. Kyrgyzstan had also seen increased social inequality and poverty. There had been a sharp increase in foreign working migrants, many of whom were women, and victims of gender-based violence. Citing the Secretary-General’s report, he said women and girls accounted for 55 per cent of forced labour, with the vast majority of them also sexual exploitation victims, as well as 62 per cent of all trafficking victims. Alongside State efforts, he urged international cooperation and attention to outreach campaigns on human

trafficking.

SAFAA ALI HADY (Yemen) said her country was convinced of the importance of gender equality, and aware that political and social development was necessary. Yemen had ratified a number of international conventions for the rights of women, and had established its own higher court for women, a national commission for women and a national commission for women and children.

Women's issues had a considerable role in Yemen's national strategies, she said. Yemeni women were fully fledged rights holders in the process of democratization and development, and held key posts in Government. The Government would work as much as it could to ensure women had full ownership of their rights. Meanwhile, she said, the international community had to also assume its full responsibilities to ensure the rights of Palestinian women.

ANDREA L.M. WILSON (Jamaica), aligning with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, CELAC, and CARICOM, stated that the global financial crisis, the food crisis, climate change and war had undermined the efforts made by States in implementing their national policies advancing the rights of women. That was especially true in small island developing States, in particular those that had been classified as upper middle-income countries and were at risk of losing funding geared towards the attainment of Millennium Development Goal 3. It was crucial to address "the iniquitous methods applied in the classification of States" to safeguard the gains made in the global effort to empower women.

Concerned about the high level of exploitation of, and violence against, women, especially with regard to trafficking of women and young girls, she added. Jamaica had developed a comprehensive legislative and administrative framework to combat it. Further, Jamaican women were occupying the highest echelons of society, including the posts of Prime Minister, Chief Justice, Auditor General and Director of Public Prosecutions. Alongside improvements in women's education and health, Jamaica had also implemented various measures to ensure social security for vulnerable women. Women business owners were provided training in business principles and entrepreneurship skills. Though limited in financial resources and riddled with many social challenges, Jamaica remained resolute in the goal of eliminating gender disparity throughout society.

KAREN HOSKING (South Africa), aligning with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, as well as that of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said her Government was very conscious of the need to mainstream gender transformation in all policies and programmes,

and had adopted five national priorities, including job creation and rural development, to assist with it. The establishment of UN Women in 2010 had provided an important impetus to the integration of gender perspectives across the United Nations system, and South Africa supported the recruitment, selection, and promotion of women in all United Nations organizations, entities and country teams, particularly at senior levels.

In the area of political decision-making for women, she added, South Africa had done well, with 44 per cent women representation in Parliament, 43 per cent women at the level of Cabinet Ministers and the fifth highest proportion in the world of women on corporate boards. Further, the South African Government was committed to pass the “truly transformational” Gender Equality Bill into law by 2013. The Government was also in the process of implementing a Comprehensive Rural Development Strategy aimed at enabling rural women to access economic opportunity and resources. The Government was also stepping up the fight against gender-based violence and in particular, sexual offences and domestic violence.

NEGASH KEBRET (Ethiopia) said over the last two decades, his country had put in place a number of policies, strategies and laws designed to advance the empowerment of women in all spheres of life. The number of seats held by women in Parliament had significantly improved to 22 per cent in 2010, from 2 per cent in 1995, while a Government five-year growth and transformation plan aimed to elevate to 30 per cent women in higher leadership positions and to 50 per cent mid-level decision-making positions. Women’s access to education and health was also vital for overall development, and Ethiopia had increased female literacy rates to 38 per cent in 2011 from 29 per cent in 2005 and girls’ primary school enrolment to 90.2 per cent in 2011 from 20 per cent in 1993.

Ethiopia would also build on what it had already accomplished and address harmful traditional practices, reducing the rate of abduction, early marriage and female genital mutilation that affected the active engagement and welfare of women in society. With regard to addressing obstetric fistula, the Government had collaborated with partners in the health sector to undertake holistic care and treatment to victims, providing surgical treatment for 3,000 patients each year, and preventing the occurrence of fistula. However, women continued to be one of the most marginalized and vulnerable group in all aspects compared to men. The Government could continue to ensure they were empowered to be effective and vibrant members of society.

BYRGANYM AITIMOVA (Kazakhstan) stressed the need to focus on gender equality and empowering women in drafting the post-2015 development

framework. Almost 20 years after adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, its fulfilment was “decidedly mixed”. It was critical to evaluate current progress in implementation of the major gender-related United Nations documents and to identify present-day emerging threats in the gender sphere. She proposed that Member States consider ways to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration that would express their strong political will to expedite the realization of the Platform for Action. Further, as a member of the Executive Board of UN Women, Kazakhstan would support that body in delivering prompt and concrete results in the field.

At the national level, she said, Kazakhstan was ranked 33 of 156 States on the activity index for women, according to the Social Watch Survey. The social and political role of women was rising steadily, with women comprising 24 per cent of the lower chamber of Parliament and measures were under way to decrease unemployment among women and raise their wages, as well as to provide allowances to women who lose or leave their jobs due to pregnancy or childbirth and for economically vulnerable families. Also, a programme on female entrepreneurship 2009-2015 had been launched. It was urgent to provide and strengthen legislation to prevent and punish perpetrators of domestic violence and to support the victims. She cited two laws that aimed at incorporating international standards into national legislation to that end.

ANANTH KUMAR (India) said his country believed that societies and nations where women enjoyed equality, dignity and empowerment were better placed to achieve well-being for their people and, indeed, global peace and harmony. “This sentiment is aptly captured in the ancient Indian scripture — *Yatra-rariyastu pujiyante ramante tatra devta* — where women are honoured, divinity blossoms there,” he said. “Women constitute half the population and they, therefore, have a pivotal role in the economic, social and political progress of the country,” he said. Advancement of gender equality and empowerment of women had been central to India’s political and socioeconomic development agenda since its independence. Indeed, that had been found in the decision to grant full and equal voting rights to women in 1950.

As the world’s largest democracy, India had set itself clear goals to, among other things, enable women to realize their full potential, enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms and have equal access and participation to decision making. India’s Parliament raised its percentage of women to 50 per cent in 2009. At least 50 per cent of the work was also reserved for women in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which responded to the needs of 53 million poor rural households by ensuring them 100 days of employment per year. The scheme also mandated equal pay

for men and women. “Ensuring gender equality and women’s empowerment is essential to the pursuit of building inclusive societies. It is also an imperative for building strong and resilient economies,” he said.

MARY MORGAN-MOSS (Panama), aligning with the Group of 77 and China, as well as CELAC, said President Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal had worked to promote women, by incorporating the definition of femicide into national legislation and creating a special prosecutor’s office to criminalize that crime. He also cited three draft laws: law 134 (2012) on domestic violence; law 392, which added a new article to the criminal code to define femicide and create a special tribunal to address it; and law 486, which penalized femicide as violence against women. Panama also had developed an equal opportunity policy, which outlined the principles, goals and methodologies based on 17 strategic pillars: violence against women, equality before law, indigenous populations and health, among them.

Moreover, the national domestic violence plan for 2004-2014 was fully in force, she said, while 26 local networks for domestic violence victims had been strengthened. Gender offices in Government bodies also had been strengthened, with 36 offices promoting equal opportunities. Among other efforts, she said that Panama, with assistance from Spain, had carried out a programme to help gender violence victims. Various judicial, security, social development, police, health and trade initiatives had also been implemented. Finally, she said Panama had declared September the month to address trafficking against persons. Other efforts included a violence prevention strategy.

ROFINA TSINGO CHIKAVA (Zimbabwe), associating with the statements made by the African Group and the Group of 77 and China, said women had been marginalized by successive colonial governments and thus, the advancement of women had been a key priority following independence. Zimbabwe had signed and ratified a number of international and regional instruments, and continued to follow up by translating their requirements into domestic legislation and policies. She said that Zimbabwe had made progress and become “one of the pioneers of the region in terms of enhancing women’s full participation in the governance and political institutions of society, and it was still working to address the “yawning gaps” that persisted. Zimbabwe had also made strides in the effort to eliminate all forms of violence against women, but welcomed more cooperation with development partners, and more campaigns particularly targeted at the male audience.

On the economic front, she said that her government had instituted affirmative action programmes intended to empower women and integrate them



into all sectors of the national economy. Zimbabwe was also among the first five African states to introduce an initiative that would equip local policy makers, economists, budget officers and other development practitioners to mainstream gender in their policy formulations. Education, too, was regarded as a critical empowerment tool for women, as it would provide them with vital skills to succeed in their business enterprises. In conclusion, she said that despite many positive developments in the status of women, Zimbabwe faced numerous hurdles. One such hurdle was a lack of access to credit, particularly for rural women entrepreneurs who lacked collateral security. But none of these obstacles would force the country to push the empowerment of women to the periphery of its development goals. As “co-liberators” of their country from brutal colonialism, the women of Zimbabwe deserved “no less than parity” with men in all spheres of life.

FATHIMATH LIUSA (Maldives) said her country was proud of the gains it had made in women’s advancement and gender equality, having achieved high literacy rates among girls and boys, as well as near-universal access to basic health care for women. Improving women’s political rights was integral to national development and a number of legislative and policy initiatives had been carried out to attain that goal. For example, in May, a new Ministry of Gender, Family and Human Rights was created to streamline gender development activities in specific sectors. Anti-gender discrimination efforts were guided by the national gender equality policy. Moreover, the Domestic Violence Act contained legal provisions to ensure victims were given adequate protection and safeguards, through law enforcement and rehabilitation of offenders. It marked a significant achievement, as a 2007 study had revealed that one in three women had faced some form of abuse in their lifetime.

“The persistence of inequalities between men and women have proved a major hindrance to women’s full participation in all spheres of society,” she said, especially their involvement in politics, decision making and access to resources. The Decentralization Act of 2012 provided opportunities for women to participate in local governance and enabled each island to have a women’s development committee to uphold their rights. However, the Maldives faced significant challenges. Women did not have equal employment opportunities and were mainly involved in unpaid housework. The modernization of the fishing industry meant that fishermen now sold fish directly to buyers, factory ships and centralized industries, limiting women’s traditional role in drying and processing fish. The rise of conservative schools of thought on issues relating to women’s rights in Islam had emerged as another challenge.

ASMA AL-AMRI (Qatar) said her delegation had considered with great

interest all the reports before the Committee. Qatar was committed to implementing the platform of action for the advancement of women as much as it was coherent with its sharia beliefs, and with the understanding that it depended on rights of the family, which were the natural rights as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Qatar had ratified many international and regional conventions and instruments on women's rights, and had made an effort to improve women's education. It had also created conditions enabling women to engage in the labour market and participate in production activities.

Qatar had been keen to assess its achievements of the Millennium Development Goals, and noted it had succeeded in a number of areas, as well as the empowerment of women. The recent ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement also reaffirmed the commitment to make every possible effort for the advancement of women. Despite all the efforts made for the promotion of women's capacities, women in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Golan Heights were still suffering violations of their rights by Israeli occupiers, she said, adding that occupation had a negative impact on all Palestinian women's lives.

AMATLAIN E. KABUA (Marshall Islands) said her country had a matrilineal system of traditional land tenure, as land — perhaps the country's most important resource — passed from mother to daughter. All women faced severe challenges, including high rates of domestic violence, limited access to education and a lack of professional opportunity. Those issues had been at the forefront of the forty-third Pacific Islands Forum in August, where leaders endorsed the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, and committed to supporting women's political representation, eliminating barriers to women's full participation in the economic sphere and acting to end violence against women.

The Marshall Islands was challenged by limited capacity and resources, she said. Despite those constraints, the Government was boosting law enforcement and legal protection to combat violence against women, providing leadership training and both job and educational opportunities to increase women's economic participation, and mainstreaming consultation into national and local efforts to adapt to climate change. "Critical gaps remain, but our political will to overcome them is strong," she said.

GRÉTA GUNNARSDÓTTIR (Iceland) said the greatest achievement on advancing women's rights at the international level had to be the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She called upon all States that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention, and States that had made reservations that were incompatible with the purposes and objective of the treaty, to immediately withdraw them. It was also extremely

important for gender equality and women's empowerment to be promoted more effectively in all United Nations processes, most significantly in the number of international processes culminating in 2015, where integration of a gender perspective to ensure full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was crucial.

"We need to reinforce our common efforts to ensure that the overriding objective is always to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment — with zero tolerance for backlashes on commitments made," she said. She also expressed support for the initiative of the African Group to intensify global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation. "Even though we have not yet reached our common goal of a global ban, the programme has demonstrated that, together, we can make a difference on this critical issue," she said. Finally, it was not possible to talk about the advancement of women without mentioning the extremely courageous Malala Yousufzai, from Pakistan, who had been fighting for the right of girls to education and was injured by "some ill-informed and backward looking male members of her society. She has set a good example to us all by doing what we all need to do, to speak up, no matter what," she said.

A.K. ABDUL MOMEN (Bangladesh), associating with the statements made by the Group of 77 and China, said his country had made substantial progress in ensuring women's rights. Its Government was committed to the advancement of women through their political and economic empowerment. To that end, emphasis had been placed on the education of girls, which was free up to the secondary level. Also, a special stipend for girls had increased their enrolment in the post-primary levels. Turning to female employment, he said 10 per cent of all government jobs were reserved for women. Women held high positions in the judiciary, administrative, diplomatic, armed and law enforcement services. In the Parliament, there were 6 female cabinet members. Recently, and for the first time, the first female mayor was elected in his country. For the economic empowerment of women in rural areas, collateral free microcredit was given with a service charge of 5 per cent. Also, many women were working abroad and sending remittances.

To stop violence against women, he said several laws had been in place. In addition, one-stop crises centres provided medical treatment, legal support, policy assistance and rehabilitation to the victims. DNA labs had been established in a few national hospitals. Also, in the last few years, the Government had recruited more than 3,000 female police officers to help provide remedy to female victims. Training on international laws and conventions was given to judges and law enforcement agencies to familiarize them with the

existing international framework. Concluding, he said laws and rules alone could not ensure justice for women, if the male mindset was not changed. As such, awareness-raising programmes and advocacy had been conducted to engage men and boys in the prevention of violence against women.

MAHINDA SAMARASINGHE (Sri Lanka) described gender-based discrimination as one of the most enduring forms of human rights violation, which called for constant attention and concerted action. Sri Lanka had long accepted the normative framework guaranteeing equality and equal protection under the law, both in its constitution and in its “Women’s Charter”. That Charter gave national expression to the goals envisaged by the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. As a result, there had been significant improvement in the status of women in Sri Lanka, demonstrated by attainments in education, health and economic empowerment. The CEDAW Committee had given Sri Lanka clear targets on which to base its national action plans for women and acknowledged that the country was on its way to meeting Millennium Development Goals 2, 4 and 5. More attention, however, needed to be placed on the share of women employed by non-agricultural sectors and the proportion of seats held by women in Parliament.

As concerns women’s empowerment within the judicial system, he said the Sri Lankan government had trained judges of the Quazi Courts on women’s issues and was considering reforms to laws affecting the Muslim community. Also at the national level, microcredit schemes, support for small and medium scale industries and women’s collectives had been launched to empower women economically. Gender-sensitive development projects would further improve post-conflict reconstruction and benefit those marginalized. He said a post-conflict context made the resolution of issues related to women critically important, specifically to prevent their exploitation and abuse. In that regard, women’s and children’s desks in local police stations had been expanded, especially in the former conflict-affected areas. The number of female ex-combatants being rehabilitated had also grown. In closing, he pointed out that Sri Lanka was contemplating draft legislation aimed at the creation of a National Commission on Women, which would be the apex body for coordinating and implementing national plans and policies and would serve as the focal point for women’s rights, empowerment and development.

MARIO VON HAFF (Angola), aligning with the Group of 77 and China, the African Group and SADC, said the situation of women around the world was a concern amid the “enormous” challenges of the feminization of poverty, an increase in single-parent families headed by women due to the migration of men to cities, and the poor supply of basic social services including education,

reproductive health, water and sanitation. Gender equality had always been a priority for Angola, especially since 1991, when the Secretariat of State for the Promotion and Development of Women was created. In 1997, it became a ministry.

He went on to say that several policies had been adopted to ensure women's full and equal participation in decision-making. Also, the Council of Ministers was considering the approval of the national gender policy and a revision to the family code. It had already approved the land law, which guaranteed rural women's access and control of land either by acquisition or inheritance. Rural women represented 53.5 per cent of the rural population. In fact, they were responsible for about 80 per cent of the agricultural production, 90 per cent of basic products, 100 per cent of the processing of those products and 90 per cent of their marketing. He also detailed microcredit and rural women's support programmes. Reducing maternal mortality was another priority, particularly through improved obstetric care and universal access to quality services for all pregnant women. He appealed to international partners for help in eliminating obstetric fistula.

CHARLES NTWAAGAE (Botswana) said gender equality and women's empowerment had gained ground since the 1995 adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, yet there was a long way to go for girls and women to enjoy fundamental rights and live up to their full potential. Botswana had continued to strive towards the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women. While many Member States reported significant progress on addressing violence against women, the prevalence remained high in many countries and incidents involving women with disabilities largely remained unreported. "Gender-based violence remains the major impediment to the attainment of gender equality in most countries, including my own," he said, referring to national statistics showing two thirds of women in Botswana had experienced it themselves.

To address those and related issues, he agreed with the Secretary-General's recommendations that prevention strategies and activities should examine the root causes of violence. At a national level, the Women's Affairs Department launched a survey to assess the criminal justice system, health and other social service responses and Parliament was expected to table a national policy on gender and development. He also reaffirmed his country's commitment to the Convention, and continued to be guided by relevant United Nations conventions on issues, including trafficking in persons. In addition, Botswana supported the inclusion of gender equality and the empowerment of women as an

integral component of the post-2015 development framework.

KANYA KHAMMOUNGKHOUN (Lao People's Democratic Republic), associating with the statements delivered on behalf of ASEAN, the Group of 77 and China, said his Government attached great importance to gender equality and considered it an important element in its national development agenda. Despite some challenges, significant progress in reducing gender disparity had been made and the proportion of girls at primary school had risen steadily. The participation of women in the policy-making process had also increased, particularly in the National Assembly, where female members, including the President of that body, accounted for more than 25 per cent of its members. Further, women comprised more than 40 per cent of all public servants. The number of women in decision-making positions, such as ministers and vice ministers, had also increased.

He said those successes could be attributed to the government's policy for the advancement of women. The Lao National Commission for the Advancement of Women, established in 2004, had played a significant role in promoting gender equality and, as its coordinating mechanism, allowed his Government to consider gender issues across sectors. The Commission had a nationwide network across all governmental agencies and local authorities to ensure mainstreaming of gender issues into all sectors. Further, his Government had prioritized the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the national development agenda. Its adoption of the second National Strategy for the Advancement of Women for 2011-2015 demonstrated its strong commitment to the promotion of gender equality and the protection of women's rights.

EDUARDO ULIBARRI (Costa Rica) said gender equality and women's empowerment were imperative to human rights and necessary for development. Women who had been economically empowered tended to invest their earnings in their children and their communities. They also had significant knowledge to contribute to sustainable development. In regards to political participation in Costa Rica, about 40 per cent of the members of parliament were women. The country was also continuing in the direction towards parity in elected posts, and the election commission would make every effort in that regard.

We must ensure through collective efforts that there was robust support for the advancement of women, he said. It was unacceptable that 7 out of 10 women and even more young women were victims of violence, even with improvements made in legal frameworks. Moreover, it was unacceptable that the

prevalence of gender-based homicide was reaching intolerable levels and continued without impunity. All countries had to work more systematically and in an integral way to prevent violence and to combat gender stereotypes that perpetuated violence against women.

DORA MSECHU (United Republic of Tanzania) said that when women were involved in conflict resolution, peace was more entrenched and sustainable. That was why her Government had made gender equality and empowerment of women one of its priorities. It was in the process of reforming all discriminatory legislation and parliament had also passed the Child Act No. 21 which protected children from torture and degrading treatment. Her country also continued to implement and enforce legislation to eradicate female genital mutilation, and punish perpetrators on sexual offences through its penal code.

Maternal health was another area of concern for her country. “Surviving childbirth should not be a matter of chance. It is a matter of women’s basic right to health and life. Women have a right to get through pregnancy and childbirth safely,” she said. But lack of access to health centres with qualified and experienced midwives was still a serious impediment to maternal health. Her Government had expanded coverage and provisions, and was “building a dispensary in every village and a health care centre in every ward”.

MWABA P. KASESE-BOTA (Zambia) said the world community was yet again at the crossroads of development, grappling with economic and food crises and climatic changes, which frequently resulted in Government failure to provide adequate safety nets for citizens and rising inequalities for women and girls. But, all eight Millennium Development Goals were inherently and uniquely dependent on inclusive and equitable advancement of women’s rights, as well as women’s unequivocal participation in development implementation. Last year, Zambia’s Government established its Ministry of Gender and Child Development to further prioritize the advancement of women and strengthen decision-making at the highest levels. Parliament also enacted the Anti-Gender Based Violence Act to provide a protective environment for women and girls.

In the last 12 months, the Government had appointed a number of women to key strategic positions in various institutions. But, even though significant achievements had been recorded reducing gender disparities at the policy level, it was of great concern that women and girls continued to lag behind in areas of decision making, political participation and accessing and controlling productive resources, even though they constituted well over 60 per cent of the productive workforce. The HIV and AIDS prevalence rate in Zambia of 16 per cent among women and 12 per cent among men further exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, leaving women even more vulnerable. “It is Zambia’s hope

that, as we look to developing the post-2015 Development Agenda, the international community will build on UN-Women's global mandate to ensure an all-encompassing gender equity programme and add impetus in kick-starting the envisaged sustainable development goals in whatever form they may be," he said.

### Right of Reply

Exercising her right of reply, Israel's delegate said she found it strange to hear the Palestinian representative discuss Gaza and not say a word about Hamas, a terrorist organization committed to Israel's destruction, which had seized control of Gaza in 2007. Hamas subjugated Palestinian women as a matter of policy. Divorced women lost custody of their children. Women could not even ride a bicycle. Honour killings were on the rise in Gaza and the West Bank.

She said one survey found that 30 per cent of married Palestinian women had faced domestic violence in their lives; that figure had reached 50 per cent in Gaza. And yet, Palestinian representatives never mention one word about Hamas or the true issues about repression. If they really cared about women, they would not have ignored the factors that exacerbated their plight. She also was surprised by Syria's concern about women in the Golan. The Committee would likely have been more interested in the plight of women in Homs, Sana and Damascus.

Syria's delegate said racist Israeli policies had been carried out against his and other delegations. The Israeli delegation had attempted to distort what was happening in Syria and divert attention away from Israeli practices. That representative, who represented a terrorist entity, should not moralize or make accusations when Israel continued to perpetrate violence against women and girls in Palestine, who were living under Israeli occupation. Many women in the Occupied Palestinian Territories were unable to give birth safely, due to Israeli practices.