



Permanent Mission of Eritrea  
to the United Nations

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National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW)**

**High-level plenary of the 54<sup>th</sup> session of  
the Commission on the Status of Women**

**New York, 5 March 2010**

Chairperson,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by congratulating you and the other members of the Bureau for your unanimous election to stir the affairs of the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women. We are confident that you will lead us to a successful conclusion. At the outset, my delegation wishes to associate with the statements made by the representatives of Equatorial Guinea and our neighbour, the Republic of Yemen, on behalf of the African Group and the Group of 77 and China respectively.

While I have the floor, Chairperson, I wish to reiterate heartfelt condolences of the Government and people of Eritrea to the Governments and peoples of Haiti and Chile for the loss of lives and properties as a result of the devastating earthquakes in those countries.

Chairperson,

As we gather together at this 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action to take stock of the progresses and challenges on the status of women since the Fourth World Conference on Women and the outcome of the twenty-third special session in June 2000, Eritrea takes pride to have participated in this important review session.

The status of women in Eritrea has progressed on many levels after fifteen years of implementing the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and ten years after the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Eritrea completed a comprehensive Gender Evaluation in 2008 and this evaluation has been updated since. Therefore, on behalf of the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), the national women's machinery of Eritrea, I am pleased to share Eritrea's successes, challenges and opportunities in the last 15 years. I wish to focus on 6 of the 12 critical areas of concern in this intervention: Education and training, health, violence, institutional mechanisms, decision making, and poverty. I have circulated a longer version of my statement for more details.

**Education and Training:** Eritrea has made a tremendous progress in promoting girl's education which is a critical area for the country. The government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) mandated for every citizen to complete primary education and it made access to schools free at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. In the last 5 years, education sector development program focused on improved gender sensitive access, curriculum, textbooks, quality assurance and school support system. Access of girl learners has increased tremendously as more and more schools have been built closer to village communities. Boarding schools and hostels have been constructed for girls and disadvantaged children. Moreover, the government introduced affirmative action for girls to promote girls participation at tertiary level. As a result, participation of girls increased from 12% to 34% at university and college levels in the last 15 years.

**Health:** Gender and reproductive health is second priority area. In 2005, the government of Eritrea formulated a Health Sector Policy which emphasizes equitable provision of basic health services to all Eritreans. Priority is given to the prevention and control of infectious diseases, specially HIV/AIDS/STI, TB and Malaria, as well as the reduction of maternal mortality. As a result, the maternal death reduced from 1000 to 450/100,000 lives in the last 15 years.

**Violence:** This is another priority area for Eritrea. The abolition of FGM/C practice has been one of its main programs for the past several years. Efforts have been made since late 1970s (before the formal independence of Eritrea in 1993) by the then de facto government, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, towards the eradication of female genital mutilation (FGM/C). In the wake of these efforts, the people of Eritrea initiated to have community laws which ban FGM/C. On the basis of this initiative the Government of Eritrea decreed a legislation known as Proclamation 158/2007 to ban the practice in March 2007. The proclamation made female genital mutilation (FGM/C) a criminal offence. While the prevalence survey on this is in process, there are already indications that the practice is

declining in many communities; but it is less prevalent in the younger age groups than the older ones.

**Institutional Mechanisms:** Gender mainstreaming which was identified as the most important mechanism to reach the MDGs is in the process of implementation in Eritrea. The Ministries of Education, Health, Agriculture, Information and Land, Water and Environment have developed a gender mainstreaming strategy which is in the implementation process. This strategy will be applied in all government and non-government institutions across the board. The government has mainstreamed the MDGs into its national development programming and they have been commonly accepted as a framework for measuring development progress.

**Decision-making:** With regard to women in power and decision making, women in Eritrea's parliament represent 22%. This means that Eritrean women in the higher echelons of legislative body have not reached the level of satisfaction and consistent effort is needed to ameliorate their position. By the same token, various measures have been taken to ensure women's equal representation in all levels of government posts. At the present time, out of the 17 Cabinet Minister posts, 4 are held by women and one of the six Regional Governors is a woman. Affirmative action was encouraged in nation wide elections of community administrators in the year 2004 and in all subsequent elections to date. The percentile of women elected for community judges in the recent election of 2008 was 27.6%.

**Poverty:** In the area of poverty reduction, the government of Eritrea has given high priority to policies and programs aimed at achieving economic growth and development. The government's commitment to poverty reduction is enshrined and articulated in all major policy documents, such as the Macro Policy of 1994, the interim PRSP and the Food Security Strategy, both of 2004. Women have benefited from the Land Reform Proclamation of 1994 in Eritrea where ownership of land is the basic source of economy. Currently, 34% of the land reform beneficiaries are women. Despite determined efforts by the people and government of Eritrea, eradication of poverty is the greatest challenge due to the reoccurring drought in the last decade.

Chairperson,  
Distinguished Delegates,

In conclusion, I will be remised if I fail to bring up the linkage between development and peace. Peace and development go hand in hand. If there is no peace, there is no development. Therefore, to sustain the achievements made so far and to tackle future challenges, peace is crucial not only in Eritrea, but in the Continent of Africa, particularly our unfortunate Horn of Africa sub-region. The lack of peace in the Horn of Africa, Chairperson, has a devastating effect on the

civilian populations, specially children, women and the elderly. The refusal of Ethiopia to withdraw from Eritrea's occupied territories and now the unjust sanction on false accusations by the Security Council has and will hamper development and the advancement of women in my country. Allow me, therefore, to avail of this occasion to call upon this august Commission and the international community to pressure Ethiopia to withdraw from Eritrean territories it is presently occupying in compliance to the ruling of the court, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), which both countries signed as final and binding. We appeal also for the annulling and repealing of Security Council's sanction resolution 1907 of 23 December 2009.

Let me close my intervention, Chairperson, by saying that we, women in Eritrea, salute the achievements of women around the world and renew our solidarity and commitment to the goals we set for ourselves in Beijing in 1995.

I thank you, Chairperson, for your attention.

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