



Permanent Mission of Eritrea
to the United Nations

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On Agenda item 59: Advancement of Women

At the Third Committee of the Sixty-Third Session of the General Assembly

14 October 2008, New York

Mr. Chairman,

Let me from the outset express my delegation's appreciation to you and members of the Bureau for the excellent stewardship of the Committee.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank the United Nations Secretariat that introduced the reports of the Secretary General.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The advancement of women and gender equality are cross-cutting issues, which are directly related to development, human rights, democracy and education in particular. Unless there are a systematic integration of gender perspectives in social, political and economic development at all levels, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly cannot be fully and effectively implemented.

For gender equality to materialize, it is not enough to outlaw discriminatory laws and practices. It requires concerted efforts directed at addressing and correcting the root causes that give rise to gender imbalances.

Mr. Chairman,

Advancement of women is viewed as key component of my country's major policy issues. Women's equality with men is constitutionally guaranteed without any limitation to their full participation in the political, social and economic spheres of the country. There are no legal or constitutional barriers that prevent women from using their full potential in any endeavour of their choosing. As a result, women in Eritrea have been participating in positions of leadership, to vote and compete as candidates in elections for any political seat in national, regional and village assemblies and to pursue on equal basis with men in all types of economic, social and cultural opportunities. The reservation of 30% of the national parliamentary seats for women in the constitution is a clear attempt to go beyond the mere recognition of women's equal rights in the political representation of the country.

Mr. Chairman,

Women are the most affected by poverty and all its manifestations. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of Eritrea, fully recognizing the gap between men and women makes specific emphasis on women's needs in order to eliminate the scourge of poverty. Whether it is introduction of improved communication systems or electrification of rural areas or access to clean drinking water, education, primary health care or rural micro-credit, women have been known to benefit the most from such activities of the government.

The poor that are too poor to borrow money from commercial banks, have been benefiting from access to micro-credit programmes. The Government has established the Savings and Micro Credit Programme (SMCP) as a component of the Eritrea Community Development Fund (CDF). It is the largest micro-credit provider in the country, operating in all the six regions of the country and 92% of sub-regions. It has to date established 357 village banks with 35,000 customers, 40% of whom are women.

Mr. Chairman

My government is working hard to ensure the centrality of the health of women and children in all development plans at the national, regional, sub-regions, and community levels and it has specific steps to ensure that women enjoy full access to quality health care and the necessary information to prevent and control the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

Training more health professionals and equipping healthcare centres with adequate human and material resources continue as part of the government's commitment to improve and expand access to quality of health services, including through free distribution of essential vitamins, iodine and mosquito nets to women in reproductive age. To reduce maternal mortality and address complications associated with childbirth, including fistula, the reproductive health programme has been at the forefront of the National Health Policy. Reproductive Health has been integrated into the primary health care system and this has helped to reduce maternal mortality rate from the estimated rate of 985 during 1993-95 to 450 per 100,000 in 2005.

Mr. Chairman,

Noting, that sustainable development and elimination of poverty cannot be attained without full emancipation of women, the National Education Gender Policy and Strategy is being implemented to ensure the equal rights and opportunities to both sexes, and to narrow disparities at the primary and secondary levels. This Policy is aligned with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and strives to achieve universal primary education by 2015. In this connection, although, statistical data indicate that girl child's participation in the formal schooling system still trails that of boys, the girls' enrolment has increased by more than three fold between 1991/92 to 2005/06. The high participation of women in literacy programmes is also very encouraging.

Mr. Chairman,

The female genital mutilation (FGM) is a practice that affects a significant number of women in the country. The government has adopted a law that criminalizes the practice. In order to exchange best practices and increase wide public awareness, a sub regional conference against female genital mutilation in the horn of Africa was held from March 27 to 28 in Asmara, Eritrea. With this new law, together with an intensified public awareness campaign, the Government's efforts to make the deeply entrenched practice of FGM history will continue.

Thank you!