



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kenya to the United Nations

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STATEMENT

BY

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OF THE

REPUBLIC OF KENYA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON

AGENDA ITEM 56 (a,b) "ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN"

TO THE

THIRD COMMITTEE

DURING THE 63RD SESSION OF THE

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. Chairman,

We thank you for continuing to steer the affairs of this committee. We reiterate our unequivocal support to you and the entire bureau and we believe that your excellent stewardship will lead us to a successful conclusion of our deliberations. My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

We thank the secretary general for his useful reports and insights submitted under this agenda item. The recommendations contained therein, certainly, serve as a wake-up call that we are not doing enough or we are moving rather slowly in our continued efforts to achieve our goals.

It is now settled that women form an integral part of the society and are critical agents of change in our society and in development in general. Kenya has for a long time been at the forefront and recognized the centrality of gender equality and the advancement of women in the society. Like the rest of the world, this realization comes with the corresponding obligation to confront the profound challenges that inhibit the woman from breaking free and advancing her ambitions.

Mr. Chairman,

Kenya has made tremendous strides to achieve goals relating to education, health and the empowerment of women including their involvement in high-level decision making. Recent developments have benefited women politically, socially and economically. While I may not be able to go into the precise details due to exigencies of time, suffice it to state that the admission rate of women in institutions of higher learning is almost at par with that of men, and that, now, at least 30% of all appointments, recruitments and promotions in the public sector are reserved for women. Mr. Chairman the lessons are clear, if women are healthy, educated and have a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners, then their families will flourish. On the other hand, if women are dying of treatable diseases, their children unable to go to school or succumbing to disease and malnutrition caused by poverty and economic deprivation the entire society shall fail. There is an overarching need to support women to access cheap credit and produce more food particularly during these tough times.

Mr. Chairman,

During the 61st session of the General Assembly, we requested for more information on trafficking in persons particularly women in order to understand the magnitude of the problem and try to compile successful interventions and strategies to address the gender dimensions of trafficking in persons particularly women and girls. This phenomenon has been increasing exponentially notwithstanding our efforts and whatever structure and mechanisms that we have in place currently. We are either not doing right or we need to put in more efforts to address the problem. The African heads of state and government gathered at Sharm el sheikh this past July took the lead and emphasized the fact that it is a violation of human rights when women and girls are sold

into prostitution, a life of servitude or as objects of pleasure. They proposed a new course of action that we have been peripherally dealing with over the past sessions. They proposed that we immediately commence deliberations on putting in place a global plan of action in order to address the multifaceted dimensions of this heinous crime. Really, we cannot wait any longer and we would invite delegations to join us in this respect.

The need for the global plan is undeniable, the timing for action is nigh. We cannot afford to drag our feet any longer. While, admittedly, the current Convention and other mechanisms provide the normative and legal framework, they do not provide a cohesive plan on how countries can work together, share best practices and combat trafficking in all its manifestations. Africa continues to suffer disproportionately as many women and girls are falling prey to the predators who smuggle them to lucrative markets in the north. As a communication hub of Eastern Africa, Kenya is both a source and a transit point of trafficked women and girls. The situation is further exacerbated by the incessant conflict and biting poverty in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. Recent initiatives by leaders and the security apparatus in the Eastern Africa region would not succeed without strong partnerships from all who have a stake in this matter. We cannot continue burying our heads in the sand like the proverbial ostrich. Let us heed the call of the leaders to move this process forward and stem this problem.

Mr. Chairman,

Violence against women continues its destructive path to dehumanize women and girls. A civilized society that has vowed to elevate the stature of the woman in the society cannot reconcile the rising cases of pervasive violations of women's human rights. Serious crimes such as sexual abuse, physical abuse or perpetrating acts that instill fear or humiliate the woman cannot be allowed to continue. Criminality is a key drawback to development. While the General Assembly and other entities of the UN rightly seized of this matter have stepped up campaigns against these problems, we as member states have an obligation to ensure that we provide more protection to women. My delegation therefore agrees with the Secretary General's recommendation for countries to fully implement the Beijing platform for action and the outcome of the 23rd special session. We also support the Secretary General's and UNIFEM's campaign to fight against violence. In Kenya, the enactment of the Sexual offences Act, the establishment of women desks in police stations and the aggressive anti-violence campaigns have left an indelible mark in the protection of women against violence. We need more partnerships in order to replicate these ideas to all parts of the country.

2008 marks the midpoint for the achievement of the MDG's. Africa lags behind in the quest to achieve the goals including goal 3. At the current speed, the gender equality and maternal health goal will not be achieved. Despite our best efforts and intentions, non-achievement will be a serious indictment on all of us. It is critical that we do more; we must continue building capacities, exert more influence, maintain the focus and provide predictable resources to countries and institutions advancing the gender agenda. Mothers should not needlessly lose lives while giving birth. We must support UNFPA to continue their good work. In Kenya, the efforts of the National Commission on Gender and Development, the appointment of gender officers in all the ministries

and public institutions, the requirement for at least one third of all appointments, recruitment and promotions be reserved for women and the partnership with UNIFEM and other organizations are bearing fruits. Not surprisingly, the current National Assembly has 19 women members of parliament; the highest number since independence.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me touch on the subject of the on-going collective efforts to reform the United Nations and the gender architecture in particular. Towards the end of the 62nd Session, the General Assembly made a bold move to adopt a resolution which included a general UN gender architecture. While the efforts are laudable, this action came late. For a long time, we clearly identified and mulled over the weaknesses of the system namely; lack of clear leadership, few and unpredictable resources and a structure that is far too fragmented. Our action did not match the rhetoric. As a consequence, a large portion of women continue wallowing in abject poverty, maternal health deteriorating and HIV/AIDS infections rising. They continue to face discrimination, violence and abuse and undergo cultural rites some of which are shocking to the conscience of humans. We have to seal the gaping lacunae between policy and implementation.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate Kenya's commitment to the advancement of women and to the achievement of gender parity in all aspects of life. Kenya will continue to work with the international community, the civil society, the community based organizations to continue providing equal access to education and training, promoting fundamental rights at work including gender rights and supporting women businesses and organizations that work towards empowerment of women.

I thank you!

