



PAKISTAN

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Statement
by
Mr. Zaheer A. Janjua
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on
Agenda Item 28:
Advancement of Women

Third Committee
67th Session of the UNGA

New York
16 October 2012

Mr. Chairman,

We align ourselves with the statement made by Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China

We have taken note of the Secretary General's various reports under this agenda item that shed light on various aspects of women's advancement in different parts of the world as well as further actions required to promote this cause in accordance with internationally agreed standards. Regardless of their socio-cultural and economic milieu, women continue to be marginalized worldwide and depending on how they are positioned within the social, economic and cultural hierarchies of their societies, they face different forms of discrimination that affects their enjoyment of universal human rights

Mr. Chairman,

We are pleased that within the UN framework, UN Women has acquired a firm footing. With a well-rounded Strategic Plan, UN Women, under the able leadership of Madame Bachelet, is making significant contributions to advancement and empowerment of women. As a member of the UN Women Executive Board, Pakistan helped shape this Strategic Plan. We would remain steadfast in our support to UN Women.

Mr. Chairman,

Our national vision for women empowerment is guided by the words of our founding father, the Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who said that "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 guarantees full participation of women in all spheres of national life. To empower women, the government of Pakistan has taken various steps to promote their political, economic, social and cultural rights. Concrete steps have been taken to eliminate different forms of discrimination against women. Today, Pakistani women proudly participate in every field of life ranging from agriculture to industry, business to armed forces and from legislation to policy making.

Mr. Chairman,

Pakistan's pursuit of women's empowerment agenda is under a four-pronged strategy including a) reducing feminization of poverty, b) promoting gender equality, c) ending violence against women and, d) introducing necessary legislation to protect and empower women. Our National Plan of Action is based on our international obligations deriving from CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action and observations made by the CEDAW Committee.

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. Women now comprise 22.2 percent of the National Assembly and 17 percent of the Senate membership and hold important cabinet positions such as our Foreign Minister Ms Hina Rabbani Khar. There is also a vibrant 90 member women's parliamentary caucus at the national level. At the city and town level, presence of over 28,000 women councilors testifies to the robust role of women in grass-roots level governance. Pakistani women have also contributed to the UN system of Special Procedures. Prominent Pakistani women have held positions of Special Rapporteurs on Extrajudicial, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, Freedom of Religion or belief, human rights defenders, cultural rights, Working Groups on Mercenaries and Arbitrary detentions.

Pakistan's commitment to addressing women's issues is evident from a range of legislative and administrative measures that include laws against acid crimes, anti-women practices, harassment of women at the workplace and domestic violence. The 2012 National Commission on

the Status of Women Bill, passed by the Parliament, grants full financial and administrative autonomy to the Commission. An office of the Ombudsperson for Protection of Women against Harassment at Workplace has also been established.

Economic empowerment projects are part of the government's efforts to create income-generating activities for marginalized women. The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), the largest ever program of social protection providing direct financial support to the women of poor households is the bedrock of such initiatives. The programme's effectiveness and pioneering drive have been acknowledged by the World Bank. The BISP also provides for imparting skills to enhance employability, health and insurance cover, access to education, and interest-free loans for women entrepreneurs. Seven million poor households across the country would benefit from this Programme.

Under another initiative, the government has distributed land to landless farmers, 70% of whom are women.

Mr. Chairman,

Despite these efforts, gender inequality remains a big challenge to socio-economic development in Pakistan especially in the 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%, with 70% in urban and 40% in rural areas.

In the face of these challenges, we are guided by the words of our martyred leader Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed who stated that a woman who cannot plan her life, family or a career is fundamentally not free. She forthrightly suggested at the Beijing Conference that "We must do much more than to decry the past. We must change the future".

The Government of Pakistan is also committed to the implementation of gender responsive budgeting to promote policies and resource allocations with a gender sensitive perspective. The Executive's efforts to promote women's rights are supported and complemented by an independent judiciary, a free media, a vibrant civil society and a growing private sector which help redress violations, provide opportunities and raise awareness.

Mr. Chairman,

The Beijing Platform remains the most comprehensive global policy framework for the full realization of women's human rights. However, its 15-year review in 2010 demonstrated that despite progress in some areas, deficiencies remain in countries in regard to all 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform.

With less than three years left to 2015, we must intensify efforts related to the gender dimensions of the MDGs to ensure their full implementation. In this regard, sustained international cooperation and global partnerships are of vital importance. Financial resources must be mobilized, through domestic and international channels, across all social sectors to ensure progress. The international community should honour its Official Development Assistance commitments, do more for debt relief and ensure opening of markets to, inter alia, provide opportunities particularly to women entrepreneurs. Increased development assistance in areas such as women education, health and job creation is essential for eliminating gender disparities.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me conclude by reiterating our firm conviction to ensure the empowerment of women in all situations, cultures and environments to achieve a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful world for all members of the human family.

Thank you.