STATEMENT
BY

ADV. DOCTOR MASHABANE
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE
UNITED NATIONS

ON AGENDA ITEM 28: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

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Check against delivery
Chairperson,

South Africa aligns itself with the statements delivered by the delegation of Fiji on behalf of the G77 and China and the delegation of Ethiopia on behalf of the Africa Group.

We thank the Secretary-General for the reports submitted under this agenda item.

South Africa is strongly committed to achieving the goals and targets articulated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals, and other global, continental and regional instruments on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Eighteen years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform of Action, much still needs to be done to fully realise its effective implementation. Multiple and complex challenges remain for millions of women across the globe in accessing basic justice, freedoms and the enjoyment of their fundamental human rights.

While significant progress has been recorded in a number of the Millennium Development Goals that has contributed immeasurably to improving the lives of billions of people in the developing world, it is an area of concern that uneven progress has been achieved on the MDGs on gender equality and empowerment of women and maternal mortality in particular. We must therefore redouble our efforts to advance progress in these critical areas in the lead-up to 2015.

Undoubtedly, the MDGs and the Millennium Declaration present the foundation and building blocks for a sustainable Post-2015 Development Agenda, where the human rights of women and gender empowerment must be mainstreamed and central to the future development agenda discourse.

South Africa recognises that the establishment of UN Women in 2010 has provided important impetus to the mainstreaming and integration of gender perspectives across the entire United Nations system.

This has had a positive impact on the UNSC Women, Peace and Security agenda, resulting in a renewed focus on the implementation of UNSC resolution 1325. In this regard, we have seen a stronger commitment by the United Nations system and Member States to address the challenges associated with women’s participation in political, electoral, peacekeeping and peace-building processes, particularly in post-conflict settings. We welcome also the renewed commitment shown to addressing the terrible scourge of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings.

My delegation congratulates Madame Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka on her appointment as Executive Director of UN Women. We are confident that
under her visionary leadership, global efforts towards gender equality and the empowerment of women will be further strengthened and enhanced.

Chairperson,

South Africa is strongly committed to gender equality and the advancement of women's rights consistent with our constitutional framework, our values and our international obligations. In this regard, our constitution promotes women's rights as human rights.

The South African Government has established a progressive and enabling legislative framework to protect, promote and advance the human rights of women. We have performed well in the area of political decision-making for women. We presently have 44% women representation in Parliament and 43% women at the level of Cabinet Ministers. At the provincial level, five of the nine provincial premiers are women. According to recent studies South Africa has the fifth-highest proportion of women on its corporate boards after Norway, Sweden, Finland and the US.

Job creation, education, health, rural development, food security and land reform, and fighting crime and corruption have been adopted as the five national priorities of government, in which gender equality and the advancement of women's human rights and their realisation have been placed at the centre of these national priorities.

However, more needs to be done as women in South Africa, especially black women still bear a disproportionate burden of multiple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

To this end, the South African Government has committed itself to pass into law this year, the Gender Equality Bill, in support of achieving 50/50 gender equality across government, public and private sectors, particularly at leadership and decision-making levels. The Gender Equality Bill is truly transformational. All organisations, entities and companies in South Africa will be required to meet the 50/50 gender equality target through the institution of specific gender parity measures, subject to monitoring and review by the Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities.

We are deeply conscious of the fact that rural women are particularly vulnerable to exclusion from opportunity that poverty and the associative ills of illiteracy and limited or no education brings, thereby subjecting them to lives mired in poverty, hardship and lack of access to decent work and employment.

We are therefore in the process of implementing a Comprehensive Rural Development Strategy aimed at empowering rural women and affording them access to economic opportunity and resources.

Efforts are underway to ensure that women, including women with disabilities become the main beneficiaries of land reform processes in South Africa.
Mainstreaming gender into budgeting processes is critical to building equal societies. Consequently, gender responsive budgeting has been incorporated at all levels of budgeting planning processes across all spheres and levels of government in South Africa.

Chairperson,

As in other countries with large traditional and rural based constituencies, South African women still bear the brunt of financial dependency on husbands, fathers, partners and family members, where they are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of gender-based violence.

As such, the South African Government is stepping up the fight against gender-based violence and in particular sexual offences and domestic violence. The launch of the National Council Against Gender-based Violence on 25 August 2012, chaired by the Deputy President is a signal of the priority attached by the government to combating this scourge. The South African Minister of Justice has announced that Special Sexual Offences Courts will be established throughout the country as an important tool in combating such crimes.

Already South Africa has transformative laws such as the Domestic Violence Act, Maintenance Act, Employment Equity Act, Child Justice Act and Children’s Act, serving to promote the rights of women and girls.

South Africa is proud as part of the African Union, to have declared 2010 to 2020 the Decade of the African Women.

In promotion of this Decade, we are committed to taking concrete steps to promote the empowerment of women on the continent.

In conclusion, the South African Government remains strongly committed to doing all that is necessary to ensure the upliftment and empowerment of women throughout our country, while contributing to promoting respect for women’s human rights internationally.

I thank you.