STATEMENT

BY

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CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, A.I.
OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ON

AGENDA ITEM 28:
"ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN"

DURING

THE

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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. Chairman,
My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 & China and Ethiopia on behalf of the African Group.

My delegation is grateful to the Secretary General for his comprehensive reports submitted under this agenda item. We are similarly grateful for the oral presentations made by the Executive Director and Under-Secretary-General of UN-Women and the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Mr. Chairman,
Almost 20 years after Beijing, there is greater determination by all to advance women’s empowerment, to end violence against women and girls and to achieve gender equality. As we galvanize the community towards the commemoration of this milestone, let us be alert not to jeopardize the gains so far made. The goal should be to further implement all of our commitments. From the institutional point of view, there is need to look at how best a coherent inter-agency collaboration both at headquarters and at the field level, can work to advance gender equality and empowerment and support countries to achieve these gender goals.

Mr. Chairman,
The social, economic and emotional consequences of discrimination against women and girls are unacceptably high and often times irreversible. Discrimination has permeated into the fabric of the society. This has led to low numbers of women in decision making levels and politics. As the report of the Secretary General indicates, at the global level, we have not done much to bridge the gap between men and women when it comes to political participation. On its part, however, Kenya has made great strides in this area. Pursuant to its constitution, the State has endeavoured to take legislative and other measures to implement the principle that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender. This is aimed at benefitting women, who have traditionally been under-represented in these bodies. To that end, during the general elections held in March this year, more women sought elective positions than at any other time in Kenya’s history, and hence, more women were elected to the two legislative bodies. Additionally six out of the eighteen Government Ministries created thereafter are headed by women. Further, in all Constitutional Commissions, where the head is a woman, the deputy head is a man and vice versa. These gains apart from being firmly anchored in the
Constitution have also been cascaded into other policy pronouncements. Kenya is determined to ensure that women’s numbers and quality of participation in decision making and politics will keep on improving.

To improve maternal health and reduce maternal and child mortality, pre and post natal health services fees have been waived in all public health care facilities. Also, labour laws provide for paternity leave to ease the burden of child care on new mothers.

Mr. Chairman,
Violence against women is one of the most pervasive crimes in the world today. Complications are often brought about by the relations between the perpetrator and the victim. Most of the time, this factor is a major contributor to inaction by the victim. We need to develop a targeted plan that will reduce violence particularly in homesteads. During the 57th Session of the CSW, the Commission discussed as its main theme “Violence against Women”. Enormous achievement was made with the consensus outcome. However, the international community must continue to galvanize global support to fight violence against women even further. The hard work is in the implementation.

Kenya has continued to play its rightful role and my delegation wishes to highlight some of the concrete actions in the form of legislation, policies and programmes that the Government of Kenya has undertaken in order to eradicate gender based violence. These include the enactment of the Sexual Offences Act of 2006, as well as a Policy framework and guidelines for its implementation and administration, the Counter Trafficking in Persons Act of 2010 and the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2011. We have also adopted the National Policy on the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation, as well as National Guidelines on Rape and Sexual Violence management. Addressing the root causes of sexual and gender based violence has also been prioritized in our development plans. Further, measures have been taken to improve access to justice including through the elimination of court fees for instituting proceedings claiming the infringement of rights or fundamental freedoms.

Mr. Chairman,
Women in rural areas and informal settlements in urban areas experience the highest levels of poverty. In Africa, the poorest in the rural areas depend on agriculture for food and livelihood, yet development assistance to agriculture is decreasing. As a result, agricultural productivity is
stagnating if not declining. This only exacerbates the already dire situation that the rural poor find themselves in.

With the creation of the Women Enterprise Fund and the UWEZO (Kiswahili for empowered) Fund, the Government of Kenya is disbursing essential capital money that is enabling women to finance business opportunities including in some of the remotest areas of the country. Through the funds they are able to invest in commercial activities such as agri-business in a more economically beneficial and sustainable way. In addition these women are being provided the opportunity to acquire managerial skills to help them run their businesses. As a result, many women are becoming less dependent on other benefactors.

Women in the rural areas of Kenya are also enjoying the benefits of efficient technological advancements in the financial and ICT sectors in Kenya, particularly in mobile phone money transfer and e-banking. One of the fundamental objectives of the United Nations is to support and assist women and lift them out of poverty. The United Nations therefore needs to support such developments and leverage the available resources so that similar initiatives can be rolled out in other regions.

As I conclude, Mr. Chairman, I wish to draw attention to the fact that as we turn the corner for the final leg of the MDGs, it is important, that we strategize on the unfinished business of education. Investment in the education of women and girls is key to their empowerment and is bound to yield high dividends. We must therefore continue to put resources into the education of the girl child despite the gains that have been made in gender parity in schools. This will be the greatest gift that we can give to the cause of advancement of women.

I thank you.