Mr. Chairman,

My delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, by Ethiopia on behalf of the African Group and by Namibia on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). I also thank the Secretary General for the reports he has submitted under this agenda item and take note of the recommendations contained therein.

Mr. Chairman,

As I begin my statement, I would like to reiterate Zimbabwe’s commitment to the full empowerment of all women regardless of their location or social status and to their elevation to their rightful status where they will be full and recognised actors in the development of their societies. This is why my country has put in place several measures to ensure that women are better placed to assume their rightful role in society. At a foundational level, our constitution guarantees the following: equality between men and women as enshrined in the declaration of rights, 50/50 gender representation in the Senate through proportional representation and elected provincial councillors and a 60 women quota in the national assembly. Several pieces of legislation have also been enacted with the aim of protecting women against violence and to ensure the prosecution of perpetrators of gender based violence. Our even-handedness is seen in our increasing attention to also punish women when they beat up their male partners.

Although we have made significant progress in the enactment of a legislative framework to advance the empowerment of women, we recognise that a lot still needs to be done to ensure the full implementation of all provisions that have been put in place. Zimbabwe is therefore continuously engaged with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that women are able to benefit from the improved legislative environment.

It is disheartening to note that in most cases poverty continues to wear a feminine face. The economic empowerment of women therefore lies at the heart of our gender policy. In most cases, women are engaged in the informal sector which often does not give them enough returns to sustain their families. It is therefore important to assist women through providing lines of credit for their businesses, market access for their produce and skills training so that they can find employment in the formal sector.

Mr. Chairman,
Women in rural areas are often left behind in empowerment initiatives due to their lack of resources and access to means of production. It is therefore imperative that specific attention is dedicated to them as we intensify efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and as we articulate the post 2015 development agenda.

Most rural women are completely dependent on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods and for the food security needs of their families. The ravages of the HIV / AIDS pandemic, have not spared rural women and young girls. They have lost working age family members and have been thus robbed of much needed muscle power for agricultural work. As a result, while grappling with increased responsibilities as de facto heads of households, these gallant women have had to assume more of the manual labour associated with subsistence farming. In our country, the Government remains seized with this situation and has put in place measures to expand social protection to affected households.

Increased investments in the agricultural sector are critical in improving the lives of rural women and in ensuring that the MDGs become a reality for them. That is why initiatives intended to boost economic growth through agriculture led development such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) remain critical. In this regard, Zimbabwe is committed to the full implementation of the 2003 Maputo declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa, in particular the need to increase allocations to agriculture to 10% of national budgets. We also recognise the importance of securing rural women’s access to land and other means of production.

The importance of protecting the inheritance and property rights of women, particularly those in the rural areas cannot be overemphasised. We must persist in efforts to harmonise discriminatory customary laws, where they exist, with constitutional provisions, which in our case override customary law. We in Zimbabwe first sought to rectify inconsistencies between the inheritance law and the Constitution through the Administration of Estates Amendment Act of 1997 which ensured that women and girls could now inherit from their deceased husbands and fathers. We continue to be engaged in efforts to ensure the full implementation of such laws through campaigns to expand awareness of this and similar laws that address the rights of women and girls.

Mr. Chairman,

Too many women continue to be victims of violence everywhere. One of the most pervasive forms of violence against women continues to be perpetrated in their homes by people they love. Domestic violence is an ill that has no place in the modern world and that must be eliminated if women are to enjoy an improved quality of life on the same footing with their male counterparts. It is encouraging to note the general improvement of laws targeting this vice. Zimbabwe is among those countries that have made great strides in establishing a strong legal framework aimed at prevention of and
protection from violence. However, we realise that the enactment of laws must be complemented by aggressive awareness campaigns that combat harmful stereotypes which are at the root of violence against women and girls. In this regard, we reiterate the importance of involving men as agents of change in efforts to fight violence against women and in broader efforts to ensure their full empowerment.

Mr. Chairman,

I would also like to reiterate the importance of education in not only equipping women and girls with the skills they need to secure stable and decent employment, but also in its ability to change mind-sets and instil a well defined sense of self-worth in young girls. As I emphasise this latter point, I recall an important issue that was raised at a side event that we co-hosted with Namibia at the 57th session of the CSW. It was noted that in a significant number of cases, women tend to believe the social stereotypes that perpetuate their inferior status. As an example, an unacceptably high percentage of victims of domestic violence often believed that they deserved to be beaten by their husbands and partners for issues as trivial as serving dinner late. There can be no acceptable reason for meting out violence in families.

Mr. Chairman,

This is why we must invest in targeting stereotypes through educating young girls and boys. Such education is an essential tool in our efforts to transform the mind-sets of current and future generations.

As I conclude, let me reiterate Zimbabwe’s support for the inclusion of a stand alone goal on gender equality and empowerment of women in the post 2015 development agenda.

I thank you!