Statement by Mrs. Elsa Haile, Director of Regional and International Organizations
On Agenda item 28 (a, b): Advancement of Women
At the Third Committee of the Sixty-Eighth Session of the General Assembly
14 October 2013, New York

Mr. Chair,

My delegation wishes to commend the Secretary-General for his comprehensive reports on measures taken under this agenda item and your good self, Mr. Chair, for the manner in which you are steering the work of this committee.

Mr. Chair,

While fully associating itself with the statements made by Fiji and Ethiopia on behalf of Group of 77 and China and the African Group respectively, my delegation would like to make the following brief remarks on Eritrea’s experience with regard to the advancement of women.

It is Eritrea's firm conviction that nation-building cannot be realized without the active participation of women. The heroic contribution of Eritrean women during the armed struggle for independence has rendered this belief to be entrenched in the Eritrean collective psychic. Yet, historically rooted cultural and social structures continue to perpetuate inequalities, restrict opportunities for access to essential resources, making women vulnerable to violence.

Women’s equality with men is constitutionally guaranteed without any limitation to their full participation in all spheres of life. Since independence, the Government has pursued policies programs with the view to creating an enabling environment for the eradication of gender based violence.

The 2007 Proclamation which made Female Genital Mutilation a crime punishable by law is one of the milestones legal measures to end violence against women. The implementation of the law through both advocacy and enforcement has substantially reduced the prevalence of FGM, especially among girls under the age of 5, which witnessed an over 70 percent decrease.

Consistent with its long standing laws of crime prevention, Eritrea has also placed protecting victims and combating trafficking in-persons as a priority in its agenda by working closely with its neighbours to uproot this phenomenon.
Mr. Chair,

Educational attainment, health and well-being and political participation are all essential components of women’s overall advancement, that they are only pieces of a puzzle that must include economic empowerment for the picture to be complete.

Whether it is access to education, primary health care and clean drinking water or rural micro-credit, or introduction of improved communication systems and electrification of rural areas, women have been known to benefit the most from such initiatives of the government. During the period 2011/2012, the achievement of near universal gender parity at the pre-primary, elementary, middle and secondary levels education with the ratio of girls to boys were recorded 49,45,44 and 43 percent respectively. The steady move towards gender parity is noteworthy.

Many health problems of women are related to labor and delivery and can be prevented with appropriate antenatal, delivery, and postnatal care. Most childhood health problems are also easily preventable. Three-fourths of all health facilities in the country provide mainly preventive services including antenatal care, delivery, postnatal care, immunizations, growth monitoring, health education, and family planning. The Maternal Mortality Ratio today stands at 486 per 100,000 live births for the period 2006 to 2010. Eritrea is on track to achieve MDG 5. About 60 percent of the population lives within five km of a health facility.

The Eritrean Macro-policy states that appropriate labour saving technologies will be introduced to reduce the amount of time women and children have to spend collecting fuel wood, and improving rural women’s health working conditions. To this effect, the introduction of renewable energy and extensive rural electrification programs has been underway. The installation of some projects such as flourmills, hand pumps, motorized pumps, energy saving stoves and solar facilities have the potential to improve the livelihoods of rural women.

Mr. Chair,

The full empowerment of women would not only benefit the family, but the society at large. Let me conclude my statement by saying that the empowerment of women will be ensured through a collective action with a comprehensive approach at the international, regional and national levels. Women in Eritrea, despite ominous societal and structural constraints, have been able to achieve significant progresses in several areas of concern identified in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform of Action as well as in other fora. The Regional Organizations and the United Nations could thus play an important role in this regard. My country stands ready to join hands to the upholding of these rights.

Thank you