Statement

by

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Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations

at the

3rd Committee

On

Agenda item: 28

"Advancement of Women"

During the

68th Session of the

United Nations General Assembly

16th October, 2013

(Please check against delivery)
Statement by the Delegation of Sri Lanka

Third Committee
68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Agenda Item 28 (a, b): Advancement of Women
16th October, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

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

The delegation of Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by Fiji on behalf of the G77 and China.

In the past several decades, we have seen advancements in women’s formal rights, including legal guarantees of equality. Continued advocacy and concerted efforts are needed to translate these rights into tangible results in the everyday lives of women and girls. Inequalities in opportunities for women and girls in many parts of the world persist. We need to create a favourable national and international environment in all fields of life for the effective integration of women, in leadership roles.

Sri Lanka welcomes the appointment of the new Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, Ms. Pumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka of South Africa, and her commitment to making gender equality central to the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Mr. Chair,

Sri Lanka is a country where a majority in society prefers the first child to be a girl. Deep rooted cultural underpinnings support this preference. It has spared my country of the scourge of female infanticide. The girl child is born into and grows up in a largely egalitarian society, where girl children get equal educational opportunities. Sri Lanka’s women were granted the right to vote as early as 1931. It certainly wasn’t an accident therefore, that Sri Lanka elected the first female Prime Minister in the world in 1960. Since then, we have also been successful in dramatically improving the quality of life of its women and girls. We have significantly reduced the country’s infant (9.4 per 1000 live births in 2012) and maternal mortality (35 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2010) rates, while achieving near gender parity in primary, secondary and tertiary and collegiate education, with the proportion of girls to boys exceeding 100% in 2010. Literacy among the female 15-29 year olds is 98.2%.
Sri Lanka's integrated policy approach to women and children has had beneficial outcomes in terms of productivity and visibility in society. While our leaders and policy makers recognize these salutary gains, they are also mindful of the need to continue and redouble efforts to narrow the gender gaps that remain in women's labour force participation and political representation, two key dimensions of MDG3. More focused attention is needed to increase the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector and the proportion of seats held by women in the national Parliament, which is at a low of 5%. Efforts are underway to increase women's representation at the local government level in order to build a pool of female leaders for national office through future elections. According to anecdotal evidence, women have shown little enthusiasm to enter politics. This is an area that is being assiduously addressed by the Government and national policymakers in close collaboration with the UNDP and civil society. One of the main socio-economic targets is to increase the number of women in the labour force from just over 31% in 2011 to 40% by 2016. Strategies are being developed to increase employment opportunities for women with secondary and higher levels of education in all Districts. While women study to become engineers, technicians and scientists, it is found that increasing numbers of both men and women are seeking employment abroad. The overseas drift of both professional men and women is an issue that Sri Lanka is currently grappling with.

Mr. Chair,

In addition to the equal rights guaranteed by the Constitution, Sri Lanka also adopted a “Women's Charter” in 1993 to give national expression to the goals envisaged in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), including greater policy coherence on women’s issues. Sri Lanka, as a State Party to CEDAW, had presented its latest Periodic Report under Article 18 of the Convention in 2010 which was reviewed in 2011.

The CEDAW Committee while acknowledging that Sri Lanka is on track to achieve Millennium Development Goals 2 (achieving universal primary education), 4 (reducing child mortality) and 5 (improving maternal health), also welcomed the following developments:

- the enactment of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act in 2005,
- the enactment of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2003 enabling a Sri Lankan woman to transmit her citizenship to her child with a foreign spouse,
- the Penal Code (Amendment) Act of 2006 which includes a new definition of the offence of trafficking in persons in line with the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols,
- the establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, and the adoption of the Sri Lanka National Policy on Labour Migration which focuses on concerns of migrant women workers.
• Sri Lanka’s commitment to formulate a National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights including a thematic section on violence against women, women and the criminal justice system, female migrant workers and trafficking in women and children.

The Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs is the focal Ministry spearheading advancement of women in Sri Lanka. In its Five Year National Plan of Action for Women’, the 5 focus areas reflect the key issues identified in UN Security Council Resolution 1325. These include internally displaced women, violence against women, trafficking in women, peace building and resettlement, female headed households, poverty and income generation. In order to implement these policies and programmes, gender focal points have been established in all Government Ministries to ensure gender perspectives in policy formulation. In every District, Women and Child Developments Units have been institutionalized.

Mr. Chair,

It is Sri Lanka’s experience that attaining high levels of human development is a necessary precondition to creating greater opportunities for all our communities, especially rural women and girls. Almost 80% Sri Lanka’s population is rural. Sri Lanka exploited cross-cutting interactions of health care with basic education, improved water and sanitation, malaria control, and integrated rural development - including building rural roads, to create an enabling environment for its rural population and achieve high human development indicators across rural and urban divides. Nearly 85 per cent of households have sustainable access to improved drinking water and 92% have access to improved sanitation facilities. Rural women’s functional literacy and numeracy skills have also enabled them to avail effectively of the financial services, including micro-credit facilities, concentrated in the rural sector. Rural women and girls also have access to the well-established Cooperative Movement in Sri Lanka, which has diversified itself into agriculture, industry and finance. The membership in these societies is 6.3 million out of Sri Lanka’s 20 million population. In the Northern and Eastern Provinces, these Cooperative Societies are integrated into the accelerated rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes. Micro-credit loans have been given for livelihood projects and house construction. The Societies coordinate with the Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry of Resettlement at the national level and with the Departments of Agriculture and Department of Cooperative Development at the Provincial level. Farmers including female headed households have been provided with cleared and demined land, agricultural subsidies such as quality seeds, implements and access to extension services. Damaged irrigation tanks and canals have been rehabilitated and demining and clearance of former cultivated land areas is taking place at an accelerated pace. A special fund has also been established to rebuild and reactivate damaged Cooperative Societies in the North and the East.

The government provides tangible incentives for private investors to establish enterprises, including industrial ventures, ICT outsourcing facilities and tourism related
businesses away from the main cities, which enable educated rural men and women to access such opportunities. Rural women are encouraged to be an integral part of the country’s emerging industrial sector and the expanding services sector. It is heartening to share the success story of a young Sri Lankan rural woman, Nimali Gunawardena, who was awarded the global title of Start-Up Entrepreneur of the Year 2013 by the Youth Business International of the UK for the success of her company Nimali Chips and Fibre Mill. Her efforts were supported by Youth Business Sri Lanka, and the story was documented in the BBC Business section on September 29, 2013.

Mr. Chair,

In developing countries, the cumulative impact of the food and the fuel crises of 2007 and 2008, and the continuing financial and economic crises since 2009 have had a negative impact on efforts to achieve transformational change with regard to women. Gender equality can be achieved only if the underlying and interdependent social, economic and political conditions are improved. With our focus also on the post 2015 Development Agenda, we welcome the theme of the 58th session, “Challenges and achievements in implementing the MDGS for women and girls.” Sri Lanka welcomes a strong gender equality focus in the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda. We also hope that the normative role spearheaded by the Commission on the Status of Women and the operational activities of UN Women will continue to expand the social, political, economic and cultural space for achieving gender equality across regions and societies.

I thank you Mr. Chair