STATEMENT BY

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Mr. Chairman,

Uganda aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Representative of Fiji on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and by the Representative of Ethiopia on behalf of the African Group. I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his reports submitted under this agenda item. I would also like to thank the Executive Director of UN Women and the Chairperson of the Committee for Elimination of Discrimination against Women for their introductory statements.

Mr. Chairman,

Uganda strongly believes that advancement of women and gender equality are vital in the transformation of society for political, economic and social development. Uganda recognizes that discrimination against women is a historical reality cutting across all countries and cultures that calls for individual and collective action to address. Uganda reaffirms the importance of the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Since the adoption of this important milestone in 1995, Uganda has put into place a number of policies, programs and enacted several legislations aimed at addressing the issues related to empowerment of women.

In Uganda, the Constitution recognizes all Ugandans as citizens with equal rights regardless of gender. In this regard, and cognizant of historical injustices, the constitution provides for full representation of women. At each level of political participation, there is a position reserved for women representative, from grassroots local councils to the national Parliament. The current Speaker of Parliament is a woman and 31% of the members of parliament are women, while nearly 30% of the Cabinet Ministers are women. These gains show Uganda government’s commitment to involving women in decision making up to the highest level of government.

Mr. Chairman,

As a state party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Uganda is committed to the implementation of the Convention and respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all regardless of gender. The main objective of the Government is to ensure that women and gender issues are mainstreamed into all development processes from the planning through implementation to evaluation stages at national and sectoral levels. To this end, major steps have been taken towards the full observance of the legal rights of women and elimination of discrimination against women in the areas of the family, education, employment, health care and nutrition policies.

One of the major tools for achieving the advancement and empowerment of women is education. In 1997, the Government of Uganda introduced the Universal Primary
Education (UPE) programme. Following its introduction, gross enrolment at primary school level increased from 3.1 million in 1996 to 7.6 million in 2006, with an almost 50:50 female/male pupil ratio. The introduction, in 2007, of Universal Secondary Education (USE) is yet another bold step by the government to make education more accessible to those who have been traditionally disadvantaged, especially girls. In addition, affirmative action by government has helped to increase female enrollment at most of higher institutions of learning in the country including all publicly funded universities.

Mr. Chairman,

Most of the people in Uganda live in rural areas and are mainly engaged in agriculture for their livelihood. A disproportionately high percentage of the labour (over 60%) is provided by women. However, when it comes to income distribution they are at a disadvantage. This is mainly due to cultural practices regarding inheritance whereby land, the main asset in agriculture, is mostly passed on to male offsprings rather than females, leaving rural women worse off than men in general. In order to address this issue, the government of Uganda has employed a multi-pronged approach that includes availing education to all school age-going children regardless of gender, extending micro-credit to rural women through SACCOS within the overall strategy of “prosperity for all” (locally known as Bona bagagawale) and engaging in public awareness campaign to sensitize communities about the needs and rights of the girl child.

The government of Uganda has prioritized and continues to make significant progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) including reducing by half the people living in extreme poverty, improving maternal health, reducing child mortality, as well as combating HIV/AIDS that have a direct impact on the welfare of women. For example, the government has put in place health care units at sub county level throughout the country to provide services including antiretroviral drugs to eligible persons to prevent mother to child HIV/AIDS infection. In view of the disproportionately higher levels of infection among women compared to men, the fight against HIV/AIDS has had a positive impact on the lives of women and girls in the country.

Mr. Chairman,

Uganda is fully committed to efforts aimed at eliminating violence against women in all forms including domestic violence and sexual violence in situations of conflict. In 2010, two pieces of legislation to address violence against women were passed: The Domestic Violence Act and the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act. Prior to this, in 2008, the Government of Uganda developed a National Action Plan on Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820 and the Goma Declaration on Eradicating
Sexual Violence and Ending Impunity in Great Lakes region. The National Action Plan was revised in 2011 to take into account lessons learned during implementation.

We recognize that various forms of violence against women are aggravated by poverty and inadequate living conditions. As pointed out by President Museveni during his recent address at the General Assembly, the sustainable achievement of MDGs and eradication of poverty is only possible through socio-economic transformation. This in part “…means less people in agriculture than in industry and services; more people in urban centres than in the rural areas; no illiteracy; modern agriculture rather than subsistence traditional agriculture…”

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, the elimination of gender inequality and advancement of women in general is a precondition for advancement of humankind. This imperative is more urgent in developing countries, particularly in Africa. While we have made some progress in addressing gender inequality and advancement of women, a lot more still needs to be done at national, regional and international levels. Uganda remains committed to implementing and formulating new policies and measures where necessary aimed at addressing gender inequality and empowerment of women.

I Thank You.