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Chairman: Mr. Hachani (Tunisia)
later: Ms. Sandru (Vice-Chairman) (Romania)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 103: Advancement of women (*continued*)
(A/53/38/Rev.1, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/87,
A/53/95-S/1998/311, A/53/167, A/53/203, A/53/318,
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Agenda item 104: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*)
(A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/87, A/53/95-S/1998/311
and A/53/38)

1. **Mr. Tabone** (Malta) expressed support for the efforts to mainstream a gender perspective into all United Nations programmes and policies. The main objectives of Malta's national policy on gender equality were the promotion of gender equality, the elimination of all forms of sex-based discrimination and the advancement of women in the legal, civil, political, economic and social spheres. The achievement of those objectives entailed a dynamic process, taking into account the different impact that policies and legislation might have on women and men, because of their different status, economic situation, access to resources, involvement in decision-making and social roles.

2. Malta had demonstrated its resolve to consolidate effective equality between the sexes through the establishment of a secretariat for the equal status of women and a commission for the advancement of women. The first of those bodies was multidimensional, in that it influenced the activities of all government departments on issues affecting women. It promoted initiatives and attempted to have a direct influence on Government action plans and programmes in order to ensure that they had a positive impact on women. The second body had been set up with the specific objective of assisting the Government in the implementation of policies and programmes to facilitate the advancement of women in Maltese society. Its main task was to achieve the elimination of any discrimination against women and to promote equal opportunities between men and women in all sectors of society.

3. Malta fully honoured the commitments and objectives of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was being carried out in conjunction with the various ministries in Malta, together with non-governmental organizations, political parties, various types of bodies, trade unions, employers and other important institutions in Maltese society. In compliance with the recommendation made in the Beijing Platform for Action that all Governments should develop a national plan of action for the implementation of the Platform,

the commission for the advancement of women had prepared a programme of action 1997–2000 which covered 10 main objectives, namely, the mainstreaming of gender equality in all sectors of Maltese society; increased representation of women in the decision-making process; the reconciliation of family, work and civic responsibilities; the elimination of violence against women; assisting women in overcoming the negative effects of social problems; legislative reform; equal access to education and training; the improvement of women's health; cooperation with international organizations; and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Programme of Action.

4. Malta firmly believed that education was the main long-term strategy that would ensure that gender equality became a natural ingredient of national culture. It was encouraging that there were now more women than men at the University of Malta.

5. With regard to the issue of violence against women, there was a domestic violence unit, run by the social welfare development programme, which offered the services of social workers, assistance and follow-up care. The unit had set up two support groups for abused women to provide them with an environment conducive to personal growth and an understanding of the experiences endured.

6. With regard to the representation of women in decision-making, it should be noted that there had been a considerable increase in the number of women represented at the level of local councils and the national parliament, but much remained to be done to achieve a satisfactory level of participation.

7. A growing number of States were recognizing that the neglect of women entailed a high cost to society and constituted a violation of their fundamental human rights which was too blatant to be ignored. Recognition of women's equality contributed to economic growth, lowered fertility and maternal mortality rates, increased child health and survival, and slower population growth. Investing in women, especially in the field of education, was essential for reducing poverty and promoting the productivity and well-being of society as a whole.

8. **Ms. Devi** (India) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 on the issues under consideration. India had made an exhaustive statement at the forty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women which had outlined the evolution of the policies adopted by India for the advancement of women within the framework of the principle of gender equality enshrined in the constitution. Those policies, based initially on a "welfare" approach, had evolved towards the idea of "advancement" and "empowerment". The

new approach was reflected in the national policy for the empowerment of women drawn up in the aftermath of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The statement had also provided details of the efforts made by India to confront challenges to the human rights of women, from poverty and underdevelopment to trafficking in women and children, violence against women and terrorism, and had provided information on the initiatives taken to address the problems of inequality, discrimination, human rights and development through a number of measures aimed at the girl child and the political empowerment of women.

9. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, the Indian Government was happy to state that many of the recommendations contained therein had already been institutionalized in India. The Parliament had established various commissions and committees to safeguard women's rights, address the general issue of the advancement of women and deal with specific cases of violations of their human rights. Particular emphasis was placed on combating traditional practices harmful to women. Strategies in education, training and employment were playing an increasingly crucial role in emancipating women from the traditional roles that were limiting.

10. Not only had India taken institutional, legal and educational measures to strengthen the role of women at the political level, but it had also taken affirmative action to ensure that women filled one third of the seats in all elected local, village and municipal bodies, thereby providing them with the opportunity to exert influence in the formal structures of economic, political and social decision-making.

11. India had made no substantive reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was committed to the implementation of its provisions, although there could be some practical limitations on the full application of some of them in the short term because of the size and diversity of the population. The conceptual basis underlying that issue had evolved over the past 50 years to reflect developments in society and the world and the place of women in it. However, despite the normative and legal advances over the past several decades, the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* equality persisted and in many cases had been aggravated. That was as true for India as for many other parts of the world. A number of approaches and strategies had been used to address that problem, all of them valid and productive, such as the "rights-based" approach, affirmative action, gender balance and emphasis on capacity-building. Recently, a powerful policy tool had been added, the concept of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the core processes of society, which was based on the idea that the

concerns of women were neither sectoral nor marginal, but were relevant to society as a whole. While, of course, there was a long way to go before the goals of gender mainstreaming were fully reflected in public policy and budgets, considerable progress had been made, at least within the United Nations system.

12. All the approaches mentioned were complementary, but there was still a need for a concept that could weld them together in a single unifying strategy and give coherence to all activities undertaken by the members of the international community individually and through the United Nations. The advances achieved by and for women as a result of the recent United Nations conferences must be brought together, a link must be provided between the disparate resolutions under agenda item 103, and the follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action must be given a definite thrust and identity. That centre of gravity could be provided by the concept of empowerment of women, but it needed to be given a strategic profile that would enable it to act as a catalyst for efforts for the advancement of women and gender equality. Empowerment of women had many facets, including political empowerment, economic empowerment, legal empowerment, human resources development and capacity-building. It also covered the rights-based approach and the programmatic approach, because it invited the active intervention of women, not only in claiming their rights within existing resources but also in developing their potential. As a flexible, non-denominational and enabling concept, it could provide the framework for existing and new programmatic initiatives as deemed appropriate within and outside the United Nations. Above all, it could serve as a vehicle for generating new ideas and strategies and drawing on best practices to realize the existing goals of the advancement of women and gender equality. Her delegation would like to have the reaction of other delegations to the utility of that concept in defining the agenda on women. If delegations felt that the idea had value, her delegation would endeavour to present it in a draft resolution of a conceptual nature with programmatic potential that, basing itself on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, could link the Fourth World Conference on Women with the five-year review in the year 2000 and the steps to be envisaged in the early years of the next millennium.

13. **Ms. Sinegiorgis** (Ethiopia) said that, in fulfilment of the provision in the Beijing Platform for Action that Governments must take a primary role in coordinating, monitoring and assessing progress in the advancement of women, the Government of Ethiopia had just presented a report on the theme "Gender and development", from which she would like to highlight some points.

14. The Government of Ethiopia had taken concrete measures to enhance the participation of women in the political, economic and social life of the country and had established the necessary legal framework for the protection and promotion of the human rights of women. The Federal Constitution of Ethiopia embodied substantive provisions that guaranteed the rights of women. For example, article 35 of the Constitution laid down the legal grounds for the full enjoyment of the civil and political rights of women and dealt specifically with equal rights before the law and in marriage, the right to affirmative action, the right to eliminate harmful practices, the right to maternity leave with full pay, the right to participate in development activities, the right to own, administer, bequeath and inherit property, the right to a pension and the right to have access to information, training and family planning.

15. Moreover, the national policy on Ethiopian women adopted in 1993 aimed at ensuring respect for the human rights of women. It had established a strategy to encourage women to participate in decision-making at all levels of Government. Consequently, the Women's Affairs Department of the Federal Civil Service Commission had developed regulations whereby affirmative action was applied to promote female civil servants when their performance review was equal to their male counterparts.

16. There were a number of other public bodies responsible for mainstreaming gender in the country's development activities and scrutinizing the gender sensitivity of proclamations and laws before their promulgation. The Government was also undertaking an overall review of its civil and criminal codes, which had existed for almost half a century, to identify and change any discriminatory provisions.

17. Efforts were being made to encourage women to take full part in the political activities of the country. Women had been elected as members of both chambers of parliament, and the upper house had a woman as its speaker. In the economic field, land redistribution programmes undertaken in some regions allowed equal treatment with regard to ownership of land and other resources. In addition, the Government had put in place legislative measures which gave women access to credit facilities and extension services. In April 1998 the Government had issued a regulation establishing the Micro- and Small Enterprises Development Agency, with the main objective of facilitating the implementation of the strategy to ensure development of the service sector.

18. Measures had been taken to ease the workload of rural women, who spent an average of 13 to 17 hours a day labouring in the fields and doing household chores. Special attention was being devoted to the development and

introduction of appropriate labour-saving technologies in food processing and preservation and fuel consumption. Recently, the Department of Women's Affairs of the Ministry of Agriculture had developed an agricultural extension programme for several women farmers. The objective of the programme was to resolve the problems of rural women and ensure that they had time to engage in income-generating activities.

19. In the social field, special attention had been devoted to the health needs of the family, particularly of women and children, within the framework of the health policy of Ethiopia for 1993. Primary health-care services, including maternal and child health and reproductive health services, were being expanded through the establishment of clinics and health centres, particularly in rural areas. She also referred to the national education policy aimed at increasing the enrolment and retention of girls in school. The Ministry of Education was reviewing the school curriculum with a view to making it gender-sensitive.

20. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General on traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls (A/53/354), her Government had established a National Committee on Traditional or Customary Practices to prepare information and conduct sensitization campaigns on all practices affecting the health of women and girls. In addition, a survey of 60 ethnic groups had been carried out and it had identified female genital mutilation, early marriage and abduction for forced marriages as the most prevalent harmful practices in Ethiopia. A study conducted out by the Women's Studies Centre at the University of Addis Ababa was expected to serve as a basis for formulating strategies that could be used by governments, non-governmental organizations and civic communities in their efforts to eradicate traditional practices affecting women and girls.

21. With regard to domestic violence, her Government had recognized the magnitude of the problem and had developed periodic training programmes for police officers in order to enhance their awareness of issues relating to the family and gender-based violence. Such training programmes were extremely useful and effective.

22. Her delegation urged those States which had not yet ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to do so as soon as possible, but, above all, without any reservations.

23. **Ms. Yamina Bennani** (Morocco) said that, in the context of the profound changes brought about by globalization and liberalization, coupled with the impact of the current financial crisis, women had difficulty in realizing their aspirations for a social order based on equality, justice

and participation. Nonetheless, countries could take the opportunity to establish, consistent with the Beijing Platform for Action, a clear picture of the measures they must adopt in order to improve the situation of women.

24. In Morocco, women's access to education and their participation in the political, economic, social, scientific and cultural sectors had led them to develop an awareness that had resulted in an improvement in their living conditions and the incorporation of their struggle into the general struggle for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

25. Women accounted for one third of the working population of Morocco and they tended to predominate in such sectors as education, health and social services; their participation at all levels of the judicial system was also significant. Microcredit was a new tool for the participation of women in development and it was being increasingly utilized in Morocco. In 1993, there had been more than 4,000 companies headed by women.

26. There were 33 women's non-governmental organizations in Morocco the purpose of which was to provide support to women victims of violence; those organizations carried out activities in the areas of literacy, vocational training and education, with particular emphasis on aspects relating to health, legislation, the environment and population. With a view to the advancement of women, in March 1997, an agreement had been signed between the National Union of Moroccan Women and the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs.

27. Within the framework of the implementation and follow-up of the Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Morocco had elaborated a strategy or plan of action with the objective of promoting women's rights in accordance with the international instruments it had ratified, including the progressive reform of the Code of Individual Rights; developing programmes aimed specifically at improving the education offered to women and girls, particularly in rural areas; increasing respect for women in society by counteracting the negative images conveyed by the mass media; and promoting the access of women to posts of responsibility in accordance with their constitutional rights. Among the activities to be carried out within the framework of that plan of action was the dissemination of the content of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in language that was easily understandable by all women, regardless of their level of education.

28. Lastly, Morocco appreciated the work of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and

believed that, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, further impetus must be given to the promotion of women's rights as reaffirmed at the Vienna and Beijing Conferences.

29. **Ms. Frouzandeh Vadiati** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that her delegation fully supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The previous month, in his statement to the General Assembly, the President of her country had stressed the need to rise above both the erroneous notion of the superiority of men over women and the view that disregarded the differences between men and women. Only the active participation of both men and women in social life would make it possible to achieve comprehensive and sustainable development. The Fourth World Conference on Women, in general, and the Beijing Platform for Action, in particular, were basic tools for the promotion of a common strategy to ensure the full participation of women in the political, social and economic affairs of their societies.

30. In conformity with the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action, her Government had developed a national plan for the advancement of women, which covered a broad range of activities in various fields. In order to implement it, 243 cultural and social centres had been established throughout the country. There were also 201 offices under the direction of the President's Adviser on Women's Affairs which were responsible for formulating local programmes for the promotion of women's rights and their empowerment. Since the new President had taken office in 1997, opportunities for the participation of women in social and political affairs had increased. A woman currently served as Vice-President of the Environmental Protection Organization of Iran and two others were the President's advisers on women's affairs and press relations, respectively. The presence of women in Parliament, the judiciary and the administration had also increased. Women also played a more important role in the written press.

31. With respect to legislation on the rights of women, she noted that the Parliament had adopted two new draft laws which guaranteed women's rights to receive a pension and to act as guardians of their children. In addition, special courts had been established to deal with cases relating to women. The presence of women in the educational system was also increasing; in that connection, she noted that women accounted for 52 per cent of the students enrolled in universities for the academic year 1998–1999.

32. However, the situation of women was particularly serious in various parts of the world, including Afghanistan, the occupied Palestinian territory and Kosovo. The degrading

and inhumane treatment of women and girls by the Taliban, based on a misinterpretation of religion, together with the other crimes committed by them, should be condemned by the relevant United Nations bodies, in particular the Security Council. Those bodies should also address the appalling situation in Kosovo. The continued occupation of Palestine was a source of concern to Muslims throughout the world.

33. Finally, she welcomed the results of the twelfth Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries held the previous month in Durban, South Africa. At that meeting, emphasis had been placed, *inter alia*, on the question of the advancement of women and on the role of the family from both the material and the moral viewpoints. The special session of the General Assembly devoted to the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was also important.

34. **Mr. Hussain Shihab** (Maldives) said that the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights represented a very appropriate setting for dealing with the question of the advancement of women. Reviewing the progress achieved in that field, in particular, the importance of legal instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, he noted that the positive developments worldwide included the increase in the life expectancy of women to an average of 65 years, the fact that women's earnings accounted for 30 per cent of all gainful income and that 90 per cent of girls were enrolled in primary school, and the decrease in maternal mortality and fertility rates.

35. However, those developments had not been universal. In the marginalized and poverty-stricken countries of the developing world, women's living conditions had deteriorated. That situation might be attributed to factors such as bad governance, the unsound application of structural adjustment measures, the poor development of human capital and a focus on market-friendly, rather than people-friendly policies. In any case, the difficult situation of women in the less fortunate countries of the developing world plainly indicated that there could be no development unless poverty was eradicated. Poverty in the developing world was robbing women of their dignity and will-power. As the President of the World Bank had recently noted, in the previous year, 20 million people had fallen back to poverty, one million children would not go back to school and 1.3 billion people lived on less than a dollar a day. On the eve of a new millennium, the international community should perhaps adopt more responsible, people-friendly and purpose-specific measures that could save those destitute human beings living in the marginalized developing world and ensure that destitute

women could fully enjoy the rights that had been recognized by the international community as theirs.

36. Following the Beijing Conference, the Government and the people of Maldives had taken a number of measures to achieve the objectives of the Platform for Action and to ensure the full integration of women into all spheres of social life. The Government of President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom had made the advancement of women a key pillar of its platform of action from the very outset. Women and girls now enjoyed unprecedented freedom and opportunities on an equal footing with men in Maldivian society. To achieve the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, a national plan of action had been drawn up. The new Constitution, which had come into effect in the current year, provided legal safeguards for protecting women's rights. In that regard, his Government was also considering limiting the reservation that Maldives had made when it had acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Moreover, a draft family law had been prepared, which was expected to be passed during the current year.

37. Concerning the economic advancement of women, a prerequisite for women to become self-reliant, his Government, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), had provided microcredit lines to women interested in setting up their own income-generating activities. The Government had also introduced, during the current year, a scheme that provided for the payment of monthly allowances to the voluntary island committees in order to provide financial support for their administrative functions. A national programme was under way to promote political awareness among women of island communities. "Women in politics" was the theme selected for that programme for the current year. Five regional workshops had been held with that theme. At the regional level, his country had participated actively in the promotion of the rights of women within the framework of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and had extended its strong support to the designation of the years 1991–2000 as the "SAARC Decade of the Girl Child".

38. His country, like many other small island developing States, faced a number of obstacles in its efforts to promote the advancement of women. Early marriage, a high divorce rate, lack of resources and employment opportunities were some of the impediments that his country was striving to overcome with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNFPA and other development agencies as well as friendly countries. However, much remained to be done in order to achieve the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Before the forthcoming review of the Beijing Platform for Action five

years after its adoption, the international community could still achieve considerable progress if it adopted policies that took into account the social dimension of development and poverty. Development assistance needed to be reformed to address the pressing needs of the most vulnerable groups and especially of women in the marginalized countries.

39. **Ms. Belhaj** (Tunisia) said that Tunisia welcomed the international community's decision to concern itself with the precariousness of women's status, the exploitation of women for sexual purposes and the need to eliminate all forms of violence against women. Tunisia strongly supported all activities aimed at promoting women's rights.

40. In respect of women's presence in the United Nations system, Tunisia would support all initiatives aimed at achieving women's participation on an equal footing and with strict observance of the principle of equitable geographical distribution so that women from the developing countries could contribute, with their dedication, experience and competence, to the activities of the United Nations.

41. Promotion of the rights of women and families had been a constant in Tunisian policy since independence. In August 1956, the Individual Rights Code had been promulgated, abolishing polygamy, prohibiting forced marriages and establishing civil divorce. The Code's provisions were reinforced immediately after the fundamental political change that took place on 7 November 1987, when all social sectors supported the empowerment project of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Since that transformation, Tunisia had supported consolidation of women's gains and recognition of their basic rights, as a defence against anti-democratic excesses and attacks on human dignity. In effect, the Constitution and the National Covenant stated the principle of equality between all citizens without discrimination on grounds of sex. However, in order to establish real equality between the sexes and promote women's rights, Tunisia had undertaken the task of amending four important codes, the Personal Status Code, the Code of Nationality, the Criminal Code and the Labour Code. The amendments to the Personal Status Code provided for equal treatment between spouses and a division of housework, consolidated mothers' rights concerning guardianship of children and established a fund for alimony of divorced women and their children. Also, the Chamber of Deputies was studying a draft Act on the regime for community property. The amendments to the Nationality Code provided for transmission of Tunisian nationality to the children of mixed marriages, and the amendments to the Criminal Code considered marriage an aggravating factor in cases of domestic violence.

42. Free and compulsory basic education was stipulated by law for all citizens, preventing the abandonment of schooling which used to affect girls in rural areas most of all. In 1997, the school enrolment rate for six-year-old girls was about 99 per cent, the proportion of girls in secondary education was 48 per cent and in higher education 48.5 per cent. However, with a view to achieving the objective of equality between the sexes, the Ministry for Women and Family Affairs and the Centre for Research, Studies, Documentation and Information on Women were collaborating on integrating women into the country's economic and social life.

43. The strategy for promoting women's rights that had been applied in Tunisia since the Beijing Conference was part of the Ninth Economic and Social Development Plan, which aimed to foster the principle of equality and joint participation for the sexes and promote the role of women so that they could participate fully in all aspects of development. To achieve those objectives, priority had been given to strengthening women's economic potential; combating poverty; bringing about a change in mentality so that the principle of equality and joint participation for the sexes was accepted; promoting the development of female human resources; protecting young people in both rural and urban environments; promoting participation by women in civil and social life; and promoting international partnerships and cooperation between governmental structures and non-governmental organizations.

44. She recalled the many meetings and conferences that had been held in Tunisia within the framework of activities complementary to the Beijing Platform for Action. Tunisia had established fruitful cooperation, which it intended to continue, with the United Nations Secretariat and with other Member States.

45. **Ms. Mahoue Same** (Cameroon) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. As the studies and reports prepared by the United Nations showed, in various countries women and girls continued to be victims of ill treatment, sexual exploitation, violence, marginalization and traditional practices that were harmful to health. The international community should therefore give priority to the question of the advancement of women and girls.

46. In that context, the Fourth World Conference on Women had given a noteworthy boost to the promotion of women's rights and women's fundamental role in the development process. States, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations should take specific steps to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, which demanded concerted action to bring into being a world based on respect for human

rights and fundamental freedoms, and first and foremost on the principle of equality between persons.

47. Cameroon supported the steps taken by the United Nations to implement the Beijing Platform for Action by incorporating a gender perspective into the activities of all its institutions. It also supported the role of the United Nations Development Fund for Women in promoting the economic and political empowerment of women. Towards that end, Cameroon encouraged the Fund to provide technical support for the resident coordinator system so that the resident coordinators could carry out its programmes at the national level, and sought an increase, as in 1997, in the Fund's resources.

48. At its substantive session on the implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits, the Economic and Social Council had recognized the contributions of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality. Also, the Council had stressed the importance of mainstreaming the gender perspective in United Nations programmes and the need to achieve equality between the sexes. In addition, it had decided that at its 1999 substantive session it would discuss the relationship between women and poverty, as women were the group most affected by the phenomenon.

49. Cameroon fully supported that prospect and hoped that a high-level meeting would be held in 2000 to evaluate the progress achieved in the implementation of the strategies for action to promote the rights of women. Also, it welcomed the progress achieved in the distribution of posts in the United Nations Secretariat, especially the appointment of a female Deputy Secretary-General, and encouraged States to continue their efforts for women to occupy 50 per cent of Secretariat posts and for those posts to be equitably geographically distributed.

50. The equality of the sexes was respected in Cameroon, and all citizens had equal access to education and employment without distinction. The Government of Cameroon had taken measures to implement a special programme of action to improve the situation of women and to create and disseminate a family code. It had also promulgated laws to punish violence against women; the equality of all citizens without distinction was enshrined in the country's revised constitution. Ministries of women's affairs and of social affairs had been established, responsible for preparing programmes to promote women's rights and protect their health, and for emphasizing their role in sustainable development. The Government was cooperating with international and non-governmental organizations in those activities.

51. In connection with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Government had held seminars and launched information campaigns on the human rights of women, with the goal of increasing social awareness and understanding of the spirit and letter of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The aforementioned ministries paid special attention to the situation of women living in rural areas, who had contributed in large measure to the fact that the country was not only self-sufficient in food but even supplied food to other countries in central Africa. Promotion centres had been set up in rural areas to improve conditions for those women, and activities had been organized to create farming cooperatives headed by women and to make microcredit available to them. Moreover, the Government had begun to study a plan to set up a credit system administered by local rural communities, for which it would be grateful to receive assistance from the international community.

52. **Ms. Leeran** (Israel) noted that with reference to the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, Israel had promulgated a new sexual harassment law placing added responsibilities on employers for the conduct of their employees. It had also introduced an additional amendment to the 1977 Penal Law defining domestic violence as a special offence and providing a maximum punishment that was double the usual maximum for assault. That amendment was designed to ensure that the courts would punish domestic violence with the necessary severity. Her country had also amended the Law by extending the statute of limitations for sexual offences committed against minors by parents, guardians or other family members. The Equal Pay Act of 1996 was designed to promote equality and prevent discrimination based on gender, and the 1998 Equal Employment Opportunities Act prohibited discrimination in the workplace based on gender, civil status, age, parenthood, race, religion, nationality, or other characteristic.

53. In March 1995, the Knesset appointed a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry to investigate the subject of women murdered by their spouses or companions, and the Commission's mandate was later broadened to include the investigation of domestic violence. The Commission had presented its conclusions and recommendations in June of 1996.

54. Owing to the public outcry at the light sentences imposed on abusive men, legislation mandating minimum sentencing for that offence was proposed in the Knesset. In 1995, the Knesset passed a more stringent definition of sexual harassment in the Public Services Law Book, and in 1996 the Prime Minister allocated NIS 3 million for an informational campaign on violence against women. Also in 1996, the

Ministry of Justice and women's non-governmental organizations collaborated with the Israeli police to begin a pilot programme to assist victims of rape.

55. The National Health Act currently covered all medical costs incurred as a result of sexual or physical abuse. A recently introduced amendment to the Penal Code recognized battered-women's syndrome, as well as the right of battered women to defend themselves against their attackers, and broadened the definition of "self-defence" from the woman's perspective. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare had established 10 half-way houses for battered women, and an additional 10 were planned. In 1996, funding for battered-women's shelters was increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent. Moreover, aware of the particular needs of Arab women, the Israeli police had begun to implement a programme to hire Arab policewomen. Plans had been made to set up a shelter for violent men, and eight centres had been established for parents who could meet with their children only under professional supervision.

56. Finally, she noted that Israel was an open, democratic and thriving society that had made considerable progress with regard to women's rights in recent years.

57. **Mr. Hadjiargyrou** (Cyprus) said that although his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of the European Union, he wished to raise a number of issues of especial importance.

58. Cyprus viewed the elimination of discrimination against women as an integral part of the struggle for development and social justice. It was resolved to fight discrimination by pursuing policies designed to lead to a gender-sensitive and educated society which would achieve equality of the sexes. International cooperation was critical for creating and expanding the agenda for the human rights of women, and for formulating and developing strategies for particular areas of concern. However, the responsibility for implementing those strategies lay primarily with the Governments of the individual countries concerned. In that regard, he noted that in order to achieve the goals of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, it would be necessary to utilize the considerable experience of non-governmental organizations. Cyprus had begun to modernize its laws in order to eliminate discrimination against women and would soon promulgate laws on labour, equal treatment in and access to employment, and sexual harassment, which would be added to the laws already passed in the areas of social security and family law.

59. With regard to violence against women, Cyprus had introduced legislative reforms and had created agencies to assist the victims of violence as well as educate government-sector professionals who dealt with such incidents. The

concept of violence against women also extended to the trafficking in women and girls for purposes of sexual exploitation and prostitution; existing legislation had been clarified regarding the employment of foreign artists and entertainers, as well as the prosecution of criminal offences. Special protection for the victims of that type of exploitation had been provided, and additional measures had been taken to combat the phenomenon in cooperation with local and international law-enforcement authorities.

60. The number of women occupying high positions in political life and the information media in Cyprus was growing, owing in part to the recent establishment of a National Machinery for Women's Rights which had substantially contributed to sensitizing the government sector on equality and discrimination issues. It had also served as a channel between the Government and non-governmental organizations, and had undertaken informational and educational campaigns. Cyprus was committed to enhancing the participation of women in public life, which would benefit Cypriot society as a whole.

61. The Government of Cyprus, which recognized the great potential of non-governmental organizations to contribute to the mainstreaming of gender issues in all aspects of Cypriot society, had doubled the funds allocated to those organizations in order to enable them to expand their activities and help eliminate social attitudes based on traditional conceptions of the roles of men and women.

62. The Government of Cyprus, as a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, reiterated its willingness to pursue policies and promote women's rights in order to achieve the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action throughout the country. Unfortunately, however, owing to the fact that 37 per cent of its territory was under military occupation, its actions would benefit only the women living in the areas under Government control.

63. **Ms. Kumpula** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/53/308) and on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/53/376) reflected the international community's achievements over the past few years in follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Federation applauded the work being done by the United Nations in order to secure resources for such activities and supported the inclusion of human and financial resource requirements. Gender-sensitive programming, budgeting and resource

mobilization were crucial in translating those commitments into action.

64. The Federation also supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that the proportion of women in Professional posts should be increased and believed that a gender balance of staff, especially in the field, must be established in all humanitarian assistance organizations. Since 1990, the Federation had been reviewing progress in improving the position of women in its secretariat in Geneva and in its field delegations in 59 countries. It had also been very pleased by the statement made by the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Ms. Angela King, concerning the cross-cutting, integrated nature of the gender issue. The fact that such issues could no longer be marginalized as special interest concerns of women and girls, but that they also concerned men and boys, was fast gaining recognition among member societies of the Federation. In that regard, a policy on the gender issue was being developed by the Federation in accordance with a decision taken by its General Assembly in 1997; the first draft would be submitted to the General Assembly in 1999 and would then be translated into all major policies within the Red Cross.

65. As the Federation had emphasized in its statement to the Commission on the Status of Women and to the Economic and Social Council during the latter's 1998 substantive session, its secretariat promoted gender mainstreaming through a network of gender focal points. Fifty-one national societies in Africa, Asia and Europe had a gender contact specialist. The most recent example was the Nepal Red Cross Society, which had established a gender desk and begun a project to increase the number of its women members.

66. During the past year, the Women in Development Unit at the Federation secretariat had focused on Africa and Asia. In March 1998, a workshop in West Africa had reviewed progress on the integration by national societies of a gender perspective into programme preparation and policy-making. The outcome of the workshop had been the development of a regional programme on female genital mutilation and the training of trainers on gender analysis. A full-time gender coordinator, based at the Federation's West African regional delegation in Abidjan, was responsible for follow-up. Two weeks previously, the representatives of nine national societies in West Africa had met in Côte d'Ivoire to discuss their strategies for the eradication of genital mutilation as part of their health programmes.

67. In Asia, the Federation was focusing on the incorporation of a gender perspective into its disaster management activities. Of particular interest in that

connection was the experience in Bangladesh, where the Red Crescent Society had developed a programme to recruit and train female volunteers to work in the field of disaster preparedness. In 1998, a case study on that programme had been conducted in order to identify gender-related issues which had arisen during the recent flood operation run by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society. The results of that study indicated that men and women had different needs and capacities, particularly in times of emergency, and that they also faced short- and long-term consequences differently. The different coping strategies used by men and women must be taken into account at all stages of the implementation process. In Bangladesh, women could communicate with women beneficiaries in their own homes and were therefore better able to test the accuracy of information regarding housing conditions; they also had access to areas which men could not enter. The experience of Bangladesh clearly indicated that the number of women in positions of responsibility in the field should be increased and that women's participation at all levels raised their status in society and encouraged other women to take a more active role in their own communities.

68. It was thus clear that the gender perspective must be considered as an integrated approach and must be reflected at all stages of programme planning, implementation and evaluation. For that reason, the Federation hoped that all policy decisions adopted by the Second and Third Committees should take into account their impact on women and men and how those decisions would contribute to the goal of gender equality.

69. **Mr. Barskiy** (Russian Federation) said that 50 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international community should meet to determine how continued improvement in the status of women could be achieved. His delegation welcomed the progress described in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/53/308) and agreed with the conclusion that further action — for example, a system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women to cover the period 2002–2005 — was needed. His delegation supported the decision to convene a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000 to review the implementation of the Beijing Platform and to seek a joint solution to the most acute problems affecting women, bearing in mind the interests of the regional groups of States.

70. The Russian Federation was implementing the provisions of the conference under difficult economic conditions, but within a firm legal framework which included a national plan of action for the advancement of women to the year 2000 and specific federal programmes. On 27 and 28

May, in Moscow, a conference entitled “Women and development: rights, reality, perspectives” had been held, which had made recommendations to the Government and Parliament and had demonstrated that many bodies in the country were working actively to achieve genuine equality between men and women and the participation of women in the decision-making process. As proof of that, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Robinson, had stressed the high level of political involvement of Russian women and their important contribution to the process of democratization in the country. The voice of Russian women was being heard in both the political and the economic fields, and a woman had recently assumed the post of Deputy Premier. The global economic crisis showed the need to give priority to women’s problems, particularly at times of economic upheaval. The United Nations specialized agencies should provide technical assistance to programmes designed to combat the feminization of poverty, promote women’s employment and support women entrepreneurs. The participation of women was necessary to the solution of many problems, including those related to social policy, and experience had shown that, thanks to their participation, the State had succeeded in overcoming various crises and in achieving a stable development situation.

71. The Russian Federation, which had been one of the first countries to become a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1980, was preparing five periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention and was doing its utmost to improve the status of women, as could be seen from the background paper on the national plan of action for 1997 which had recently been submitted to the Secretariat. His Government hoped that, on the eve of the third millennium, the United Nations was ready to meet the challenge of guaranteeing women a decent life and equal rights.

72. **Mr. Rustam-Zade** (Azerbaijan) said that, since its independence, the Azerbaijani Republic had attempted to establish a democratic State, and one key to achieving that goal was to improve the status of women. A firm legal basis already existed which guaranteed the rights and freedoms of women, as well as mechanisms for their application: Azerbaijan had signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1992, and the rights and freedoms of women were guaranteed in its Constitution and laws (the Labour, Civil and Penal Codes and laws on marriage and the family, paid leave, retirement, employment and youth). Furthermore, the Republic had, by decree, established the State Committee for Women’s Affairs, which was responsible, *inter alia*, for increasing the number of women employed by the State. Women were present in all

State organs, in some of which they held high-level posts, and they were represented in all spheres of activity.

73. Many problems, however, still remained to be resolved: the aggression by the Republic of Armenia against Azerbaijan and the occupation and exploitation of over 20 per cent of its territory, as well as the presence of some 200,000 refugees who had fled the purges and millions of displaced persons had led to a serious deterioration of the economic and social situation, which affected women and children in particular. In the concentration camps of the Armenian cities of Erevan, Abovyan and Leninakan, and in the Shusha and Djankendi regions (in the occupied zone of Azerbaijan), women and children were being held hostage. According to the State Commissioner of the Azerbaijani Republic for prisoners of war, 4,858 Azerbaijani citizens had disappeared, including 316 women, 60 children and 254 older persons. The Government of Armenia had refused to turn them over to the International Committee of the Red Cross and had not allowed its representatives to enter the zones where they resided. The Azerbaijani women being held in Armenian prisons suffered degrading treatment and torture.

74. His delegation once again urged those States which were building peaceful societies and working to eradicate all forms of discrimination to use their influence with the Government of Armenia to free the Azerbaijani women from their aggressors immediately. Many other women were living in refugee and displaced persons camps and could not work, had no financial resources and could not fulfil their duties as women and mothers. Many, after suffering the horrors of the Armenian purges and seeing their children, husbands and brothers die, required medical attention. The birth rate had declined despite the measures taken by the Government of Azerbaijan to support motherhood. The Government had done, and would continue to do, everything possible to improve the situation of those women.

75. His delegation thanked the United Nations and the non-governmental and humanitarian organizations that had helped Azerbaijan to deal with the occupation by providing financial and humanitarian assistance to the refugees, including women. Azerbaijan had paid dearly for its independence and much remained to be done to consolidate it, but it would not waver in its attempts to build a democratic society and would do all it could to enable the Azerbaijani women who had suffered the tragedy of armed aggression to return to their homes as soon as possible.

76. **Ms. Haile** (Eritrea) said that the Eritrean people were still strongly influenced by the significant information on social relations between men and women developed during the struggle for liberation, by the policies of the Government

in that area and by the fact that women had comprised at least 30 per cent of the liberation army. The social mobilization carried out during the liberation struggle and the current advocacy work undertaken by the Government and various institutions within the country had provided a strong basis for the socio-economic and political advancement of women. That experience informed the various activities of the National Union of Eritrean Women: literacy programmes, vocational training, advocacy, legal support and other development projects, as well as publications, workshops and counselling services designed to inform women of their rights and the services available to them. The commitment of the Government was reaffirmed in its policy on gender issues, which included the following main elements: efforts would be made to sensitize society on the decisive role of women in the socio-economic, political and cultural transformation of the country; the equal rights of women would be upheld and all laws detracting from those rights would be changed; the participation of women in education, economic activity and employment would be expanded; appropriate labour-savings technologies would be introduced to reduce the burden of women's work in the household and in other activities; mother and child health services would be improved and expanded; and equal pay for equal work was guaranteed.

77. With regard to legislation, the Government had revised the Civil and Penal Codes to abolish child and arranged marriages, to prohibit bride price and dowry, to raise the legal age of marriage to 18 years and to ensure the equal rights of women to initiate divorce proceedings. The new land proclamation adopted by the National Assembly of Eritrea in 1994 ensured that women had equal access to land for both housing and farming upon reaching the age of 18. Eritrea had signed the instrument of accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and its Constitution recognized gender equality. The Constitution prohibited any act that violated the human rights of women or limited their participation; it granted citizenship to any person born of an Eritrean father or mother; and it established the right to marry and found a family freely, with equality of rights and duties in all family affairs. In addition, it had established by law a 60-day paid maternity leave and had legalized the rights of citizenship for women and for children born out of wedlock. Finally, the Penal Code had been revised to exclude all discriminatory clauses and to introduce measures to protect women: rape was punishable by a maximum prison sentence and trafficking and prostitution were also severely punished.

78. The Government had also taken administrative measures, including measures to combat domestic violence — which was no longer a serious problem according

to health, police and judicial authorities — and to give women equal opportunity in education. Inter-ministerial collaboration also promoted consciousness-raising on gender issues. The Ministry of Education had a strong policy of promoting girls' education, taking into consideration the traditional and cultural obstacles, and was planning an integrated programme aimed at the gender sensitization of teachers, the revision of textbooks and increased emphasis on the enrolment of girls. Similarly, other ministries, such as the Ministries of Justice, Finance, Labour and Agriculture, had contributed to the promotion and advancement of women. The participation of women in Government had risen from 20 to 30 per cent through the assignment of fixed quotas in both the National and the Regional Assemblies, the objective being to achieve 50 per cent.

79. In the economic sphere, the new land proclamation recognized that the lower status of women had been due to gender imbalances arising from inequality of opportunities and access to productive resources and their related benefits. Before independence, most women did not have access to credit because the requirements were gender-biased. Currently, there were no real alternative credit systems for women, but efforts were under way to establish a rural credit system for households headed by women, and ACCORD, an international non-governmental organization working in the southern part of the country, had established a community-based credit system that allowed women to borrow without the need for the consent of their spouses.

80. Although the positive achievements could not be underestimated, serious obstacles remained which prevented the women of Eritrea from achieving true equality. The law provided a framework for improving their status, but it was unevenly implemented because of ingrained cultural attitudes; large segments of rural and urban society still resorted to customary laws in regard to marriage and divorce and dangerous traditional practices, such as circumcision, continued to prevail in many areas. Nevertheless, Eritrea had the political will and a firm commitment to the advancement of women and would achieve its objective sooner rather than later.

81. **Mr. Al-Malki** (Bahrain) said that the advancement of women and their rights must be accompanied by that of society, since women constituted half of society and formed the basis of future generations. Unless their rights were recognized, women could not play an effective role; that would have unfortunate consequences and would hinder the progress of society itself. His Government had taken a series of measures to implement the conclusions and recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing.

82. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, in coordination with governmental authorities and various organizations dealing with women's issues had adopted a ministerial decision to create a mechanism responsible for follow-up to the recommendations of the Beijing Conference. Women in Bahrain exercised all their rights, both in the field of education and in the workplace. National committees had been established to formulate strategies for the overall advancement of women and a national women's committee had been created to monitor closely the implementation of recommendations and resolutions adopted at international conferences. Various workshops had also been held to increase public awareness of the role of women and the need to provide them with legal protection and of the importance of protecting children and amending the various legislative provisions concerning them.

83. The State of Bahrain provided women with the necessary protection and adequate conditions for the prevention of any kind of discrimination and violence, in accordance with the spirit of the Islamic Sharia and with all international agreements and instruments. The country had women teachers, engineers and doctors, and women studied at both schools and universities.

84. **Ms. Rajaonarivelo** (Madagascar) said that her delegation fully supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. She was proud that Madagascar had been one of the first States to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, she welcomed the fact that 162 States had already ratified it and was convinced that the goal of universal ratification of the Convention would be achieved by the year 2000.

85. In order to achieve that goal, joint efforts must be made, awareness campaigns must be carried out and some States must be persuaded to withdraw their substantive reservations, particularly those concerning the provisions for the establishment of effective gender equality. National legislation or religious or cultural customs were generally invoked to justify such reservations but, in reality, they were motivated by a refusal to recognize gender equality in the fields of politics, education, civil and legal affairs and family rights.

86. Thus, human rights must be interpreted from the point of view of gender equality and that perspective must be incorporated into governmental policies and programmes. In order to achieve such equality, political will and a change of attitude would be required and the necessary resources must be mobilized to create an environment favourable to the

exercise by women of their fundamental rights, such as the right to health and the right to education.

87. Priority must also be given to acts of violence against women and the need for international assistance in order to prevent violence in the home and the workplace and in time of war. That would require the enactment of rigorous legislation and increased respect for such legislation at the national and international levels. In that regard, she welcomed the fact that rape, sexual exploitation and other forms of sexual violence against women had been defined as crimes against humanity and war crimes in the Statute of the International Criminal Court recently adopted in Rome. She stressed the importance of ensuring an equitable number of women among the judges of such courts. In that regard, she wished to reaffirm her country's commitment and political will as demonstrated by the nomination of a woman candidate to the post of judge of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the appointment of women to the posts of Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister of Population and Minister of the Civil Service, and the election of various women deputies in the legislative elections. Some progress had already been made: for example, the adoption of an act which granted women the right to an equal share of real property and the so-called "Misintaka Act", which stipulated that women could leave the matrimonial home if they felt that they were ill-treated or believed that their rights had not been recognized.

88. Poverty was the true barrier to the advancement of women. It was to be hoped that the international community, in particular, the developed countries and interregional organizations, would provide greater assistance to the developing and least developed countries so that they could increase their capacity to combat poverty and make progress towards the gradual elimination of the feminization of poverty.

89. It was also essential to promote women's participation in decision-making processes and to develop a legal framework more favourable to them. In that regard, the Malagasy Association of Women Jurists was making a major contribution to increasing women's sensitivity to and awareness of their rights; its members voluntarily visited rural areas to facilitate the access of women and girls to an education and the participation of women in national politics through the delivery of civil registration documents within the framework of "operation birth certificate". In addition, access to health services, vocational training, education and information were among the primary goals of the government programme. At the same time, non-governmental organizations and various associations included among their activities the provision of social funds to women in order to

encourage them to engage in business- related activities such as the production of, and trade in, crafts, textiles and agricultural products. The granting of microcredit gave the Government's programme an effective instrument for the protection of the most vulnerable population groups, in particular, women, from the principal effects of structural adjustment and the trading system.

90. In conclusion, she reiterated her delegation's appeal for improved, strengthened international and bilateral cooperation on behalf of developing countries, especially countries which, like Madagascar, were subject to natural disasters.

91. **Mr. Nakandala** (Sri Lanka) referred to the numerous measures taken by his country to promote the advancement of women, and emphasized the high priority which its policies placed on that issue.

92. With respect to the programme of activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), he said that several follow-up activities had been carried out with the regional organizations. However, he considered that those activities should be strengthened and that UNIFEM could make an important contribution to the development of target-oriented projects that would directly benefit the most disadvantaged groups of women. To that end, his country wished to work closely with the Fund.

93. He welcomed the report on trafficking in women and girls (A/53/409), submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/98. A Committee responsible for considering that matter had been established in the Ministry of Women's Affairs and, in 1997, a Child Protection Authority had been established under the direct supervision of the President of the Republic. At the regional level, a draft regional convention on preventing and combating trafficking in women and children for the purpose of prostitution had been prepared and would be concluded at the meeting of the Heads of State or Government of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1999.

94. His delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and had strengthened its national machinery for the promotion of women's rights. In 1997, the mandate of the Ministry of Women's Affairs had been extended. A three-year development plan (1998–2000) had been prepared, and gender focal points had been established in the line ministries. With the assistance of UNDP, the Ministry of Women's Affairs had conducted two workshops on gender equality issues for policy makers and planners. With assistance from Canada, the Institute of

Development Administration was currently carrying out a project on gender sensitization for civil servants. Draft legislation had been adopted on the establishment of a National Commission on Women. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat, a pilot project on mainstreaming a gender perspective in the national budget was being carried out. The aim was to develop a budget-analysis methodology that would make gender impact disaggregation possible as from 1999.

95. With the assistance of ILO, the National Commission on Women was studying the impact of the policies of globalization and the development of a market economy, particularly the effects of structural adjustment policies on the status of women. Sri Lanka had adopted a multifaceted approach to poverty, the eradication of which should necessarily be based on the advancement and empowerment of women. During their recent meeting in Colombo, the Heads of State or Government of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation had reiterated the Association's commitment to eradicating poverty in the South Asian region no later than the year 2002.

96. **Ms. Al-Rummaithi** (United Arab Emirates) said that, on the eve of the twenty-first century, it was essential to recognize the importance of the role of women in the economic, social and environmental fields. Their participation must be fundamental to the achievement of sustainable development. The outcome of the Beijing Platform for Action was far from homogeneous, since, in many countries, the lack of infrastructure, natural disasters or the occupation of territory by foreign forces had adversely affected the situation of women, who lacked essential services in such areas as education, health, housing and food. The current assistance policy of the international financial institutions and the donor community had impeded the implementation of reform strategies and had had a harmful impact on the efforts of the developing countries to facilitate the integration of women, guarantee the full enjoyment of their rights and strengthen their participation as productive actors in society. The status of women would improve only if their full integration in society, on the basis of equality, justice and respect for the universal principles of human rights, could be guaranteed. The international community must support local efforts to that end. Her delegation requested the international financial institutions and donor countries to reassess their assistance policies and accord the utmost importance to the review and evaluation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and the Beijing Platform for Action in the year 2000. International programmes for the social, political and economic advancement of women must take into account the norms and values, including religious values, of each country. Her

delegation recognized the value of the activities of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, which were essential to the implementation and follow-up of international programmes for the advancement of women. It supported, in particular, the research activities and field studies financed by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for the benefit of the least developed countries and countries plunged into poverty as a result of war and other scourges.

97. She expressed concern at the suffering to which Arab and Palestinian women were subjected in the occupied territories. They were victims of violence and were deprived of their freedom and their homes by the Israeli authorities. The international community should exert pressure on Israel to cease violating United Nations resolutions and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and other international human rights instruments.

98. The Constitution of the United Arab Emirates, which was based on the principles of Islam, provided for the improvement of the status of women, their equality before the law, their enjoyment of the right to own and manage property and other rights, such as the right to work, and recognized their fundamental role in all aspects of family life by establishing, in particular, a system of paid maternity leave. As a result of the personal intervention of the Head of State, the situation of women had improved with respect, *inter alia*, to their participation at the management and decision-making levels in the public and private sectors. Women participated in conferences, seminars and workshops. Recently, pursuant to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a National Commission for the Advancement of Women had been established. Among its other functions, through literacy programmes and the provision of maternal and child assistance, the National Commission sought to improve the status of women in rural and remote areas in order to enable them to participate in the national development process.

Ms. Sandru (Vice-Chairman) took the Chair.

99. **Ms. Aloysie Cyanzayire** (Rwanda) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Rwanda was a member of the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women. It had taken various measures to implement both the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its own Constitution, which established the equality of all citizens before the law. Her Government had launched a broad legislative reform programme with a view to eliminating any provisions which even implied

discrimination against women. For the first time, a law on inheritance and marriage would be promulgated. Women would be able to play an active role in national development. That was even more significant in view of the fact that, following the genocide of 1994, women, in many cases widows and heads of household, accounted for 60 per cent of the population.

100. The situation of Rwanda was especially tragic, since the genocide, which had been of unprecedented intensity, had claimed more than 1 million Rwandan lives and caused terrible trauma among the survivors. One of the atrocities had involved the rape of women by their husbands' executioners. Her Government had therefore welcomed the fact that the International Criminal Tribunal, based in Arusha, had recognized such acts as crimes against humanity. Her delegation thanked all those delegations which had addressed the matter.

101. Her Government supported activities for women organized by civil society. For example, a number of organizations had been established to help Rwandan widows and orphans, providing support to the peace and national reconciliation process. Another serious problem in Rwanda was that many women who had returned from exile were impoverished and required special attention.

102. Despite all those difficulties, her Government had implemented a policy for the protection of women's rights. For example, in 1996, a law had been adopted on the prosecution of the alleged perpetrators of genocide. Her Government was also attempting to translate the constitutional principle of gender equality into reality; that would guarantee both men and women the right to receive an education, to engage in remunerated work and to vote. Nonetheless, while there were no legal obstacles to the participation of women in public affairs, they were not sufficiently represented in decision-making bodies. Moreover, illiteracy was more prevalent among women than among men even though women played a more significant role in the upbringing of children.

103. To meet those concerns, the Government had taken steps to improve the status of women. For example, the Ministry of the Family and Women's Affairs was represented in other ministerial departments and local communities in order to incorporate the gender perspective into the Government's programmes. Also, information campaigns had been launched so that women could know their rights and overcome social prejudices. In addition, the Government had established a programme whereby organizations were being established in which women could make their ideas known and raise their problems at all levels in the administration,

thus promoting the participation of women in public life. The Government also supported the participation of women in development and therefore assisted women's organizations that promoted the establishment of small businesses.

104. On the international level, Rwanda, which was a member of the Commission on Human Rights, would do everything possible to contribute to the search for solutions to the problems that affected women. In 1997 and 1998, two conferences had been held in Kigali on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and the secretariat of the pan-African conference on women was to be established there. In that context, Rwanda was grateful for the support it had received from the international community, international organizations and friendly countries.

105. **Ms. Aghadjanian** (Armenia) said that the guidelines set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action constituted a solid basis for national, regional and international action for the advancement of women. The impetus which the Platform for Action had given to the principle of gender equality must be maintained and consolidated by affirmative action. However, the principle could be translated into reality only if Governments and civil society took steps to protect all the human rights of women. To do that, the causes and consequences of gender inequality had to be understood, and gender-disaggregated data would have to be collected on the obstacles that prevented the full enjoyment by women of their rights. Armenia, which had participated actively in the work of the Fourth World Conference on Women, had resolved to fulfil its commitments and meet the objectives set in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

106. Armenia had begun to implement economic and political reform after independence, but the country's situation was serious because, apart from the problems of an economy in transition, its transport routes had been blocked by Azerbaijan, it had experienced a severe energy crisis and it had suffered the effects of a devastating earthquake. Moreover, from 1988 to 1990, Armenia had taken in thousands of refugees who had fled Azerbaijan in the wake of the massacres committed in Sumgait and Baku and during the war in Nagorny Karabakh. Refugees made up 12 per cent of Armenia's 3 million inhabitants. Refugee women, many of whom had been victims of violence in Azerbaijan, faced many difficulties, as did women living in the area affected by the earthquake. Although the Government had initiated programmes to assist refugees and residents of the disaster area, it did not have adequate resources and had to rely on assistance from international organizations and individual countries.

107. Armenian legislation had always provided for equal rights for women and men, but the real challenge lay in changing the traditional mentality, which limited the role of women to that of wife and mother. In 1997, Armenia had submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women with a view to initiating a dialogue and laying the groundwork for monitoring the status of women. With a view to improving that status, the Government had established a Commission on gender issues, consisting of high-level officials from various ministries and representatives of non-governmental organizations, and, on the basis of the Commission's recommendations, had begun to develop a national plan for the advancement of women. Despite all those measures, Armenian women still did not occupy high-level positions, nor were they adequately represented in Parliament. The Government would therefore make efforts to create favourable conditions to eradicate the stereotyped ideas that inclined women towards certain careers and ensure that women could enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men in all spheres of society.

108. Although much progress had been made in the Secretariat in terms of the advancement of women, there was still much to be done, and her delegation therefore hoped that efforts would be continued to increase the representation of women from countries with economies in transition and from developing countries. It also hoped that 1998 would be regarded as a milestone in the promotion of the rights of women and gender equality.

109. **Mr. Ingolfsson** (Iceland) said that it was not easy to evaluate the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, an ambitious contribution to the international struggle for women's rights and gender equality. The development and welfare of nations was evaluated according to the two indexes introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1995, the gender-related development index and the gender empowerment measure. It was to be hoped that gender equality would always be taken into account when development was being evaluated.

110. The Beijing Platform for Action showed that inequality was deeply rooted and that it varied from country to country and from culture to culture. His Government had developed a plan of action to promote gender equality during the period 1998–2000 that was based on the recommendations of a governmental committee appointed to evaluate the status of women in Iceland with respect to the Beijing Platform for Action. The goal of the plan of action was to integrate gender equality into all phases of policy formulation and all measures by the State. To that end, ministries and other State

institutions would receive a circular introducing a decision by the Government to the effect that all statistical data and reports must be gender-disaggregated. The plan of action consisted of a wide variety of projects, including a study the purpose of which was to check whether official policy formulation was based on gender equality, and a research project on the economic power of men and women and their positions in society. While the plan was in force, a regular evaluation of Government draft legislation would be conducted to check whether gender equality was being taken into account.

111. International action plans and governmental measures were of great importance to hasten the progress of gender equality. However, solidarity was needed too, between non-governmental organizations, the news media, employers and labour unions. His Government hoped that extensive consultation on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Iceland would generate further cooperation between the various sectors. Gender equality not only promoted women's rights, it also improved their quality of life and was the best way to contribute to economic growth and development in the world.

112. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had thus concluded its general discussion and he invited those representatives who wished to speak in exercise of the right of reply to do so.

113. **Ms. Hadar** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that she wished to clarify her Government's policy regarding Israel's northern frontier, in other words south Lebanon, as it had already done in various communications transmitted to the Secretary-General. Israel was prepared to comply with the provisions of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) within a framework that would ensure the implementation of all the elements of that resolution, including the goals of restoring international peace and security and assisting the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority. Until satisfactory arrangements were made, Israel had no other choice but to exercise its right of self-defence in order to protect the civilian population from acts of aggression originating in Lebanese territory. As the Prime Minister of Israel had noted, it was a curious circumstance that when Israel expressed its readiness to leave south Lebanon, the Arab side did everything possible to prevent that happening. The no less curious assertion that the economic and social status of women in the zone would be magically transformed by an Israeli withdrawal did not merit serious consideration. If women in south Lebanon really wanted to contribute to the establishment of peace in the region, they should ask their Government to cooperate with Israel in creating security

conditions that would make a speedy implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) possible.

114. **Mr. Kisenyi** (Uganda), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that at the previous meeting the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had slandered his Government and country by making false accusations that had no relationship to the item under discussion. The record of Ugandan soldiers on all their missions, including United Nations peacekeeping operations, was well known. His Government was fully committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially as it related to women and children; accordingly, such allegations were unfounded and should not be taken seriously.

115. **Ms. Aghadjanian** (Armenia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said, with reference to the statement by Azerbaijan, that one could not speak of aggression or of occupation of Azerbaijan by Armenia. The conflict in question was between the self-defence forces of Nagorny Karabakh and the Government of Azerbaijan. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had sent several missions to Armenia, and its reports did not mention the existence of "concentration camps" in any part of Armenia. The statement by the representative of Azerbaijan reflected cynicism, since there were indeed Armenian detainees in his country, including a large number of women and young children. There were no women and children detained in Armenia, nor had there ever been, as shown by the ICRC reports. Only armed individuals or groups that had attempted to enter Armenia from Azerbaijan had been detained. Moreover, her Government had unilaterally released all its prisoners of war in March 1996 as a sign of good will. She called upon Azerbaijan to do the same in order to help to create a climate of confidence in the region.

116. **Mr. Najem** (Lebanon), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the representative of the Israeli occupation forces appeared to believe that the world turned a blind eye to its aerial and sea bombardments of Lebanese hamlets and to the daily killing of innocent civilians, which violated international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The attack on United Nations headquarters in April 1996, which had caused the death of 106 civilians, showed the barbarity of the Israeli crimes, which violated basic human rights, including the right to life, work and security. The Israeli army had occupied Lebanon since 1978; for 20 years it had defied the provisions of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), and was even attempting to misrepresent its content, thereby undermining international law. Israel had sought to alter the demographic structure of the country and to impose its own type of peace on Lebanon. It would not succeed in doing so, however, for Lebanon believed in peace as defined in Council

resolution 425 (1978) and in the principle of land for peace. What the representative of the occupation forces described as acts of aggression were, rather, noble examples of legitimate resistance against those occupation forces. It never ceased to amaze him that the representative of the occupation forces should seek to justify the presence of her country's army in Lebanon and should advise Lebanese women to intercede with their Government to induce it to agree to Israel's terms. Lebanon did not accept her advice, and, for its part, counselled Israel to withdraw its troops in compliance with Council resolution 425 (1978), which was the only way to bring stability to the region.

117. **Mr. Rustam-Zade** (Azerbaijan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that while Armenia spoke of cynicism, his Government spoke of facts — facts which showed that there was a conflict between the two countries, contrary to the statement made by the representative of Armenia. Armenia continued to arm itself, and there were actual deliveries of military equipment, with the most recent one totalling \$1 billion. Furthermore, in 1989 there had been a declaration of unification between Nagorny Karabakh and Armenia, and the Armenian Government referred to the region as the “province of Nagorno-Karabakh,” as if it belonged to Armenia. Armenian troops had pillaged the area, not to speak of many other incidents which showed that there had indeed been aggression by Armenia against Azerbaijan. The Security Council had adopted a number of decisions putting the international community on notice. The information on refugees had been presented by a State commission on prisoners of war, refugees and missing persons; there were no ICRC reports, because ICRC representatives were not allowed to visit the camps. On the other hand, there were still 20,000 Armenians living in Baku and in other towns in Azerbaijan.

118. **Ms. Aghadjanian** (Armenia) said that the Azerbaijani references to the purchase of military equipment by Armenia had no relationship to what the Committee was discussing. Such matters were the responsibility of the First Committee and the joint commission established to investigate the question. No accusations should be made until the commission had finished its work. She recommended that everyone should verify the reports of ICRC and other international organizations that had visited Armenia.

119. **Mr. Rustam-Zade** (Azerbaijan) reiterated that his statements were based on facts and that facts must be taken into account. He was in favour of settling the conflict on the basis of the 1996 decisions of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Autonomy for Nagorny Karabakh must be accepted in the framework of Azerbaijan, in accordance with the principles laid down in the Helsinki

Act of 1975. The only country that did not follow those principles was Armenia, which continued to defy the OSCE decisions and to be against the peace process. The international community should take steps to exert pressure and ensure that the aggression was halted.

120. **Ms. King** (Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) said that the comments made by various delegations concerning the implementation of the 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action would be very useful in the preparation of the background information on the comprehensive review and appraisal of the progress made under the Platform.

121. Mention had also been made of new areas of interest to Member States which the Commission on the Status of Women would need to consider as it discussed its next programming cycle; those areas included the impact of globalization and the financial crisis on women, HIV/AIDS, poverty eradication, training for both men and women in gender issues, the empowerment of women through education and entrepreneurial skills, violence against women, the implementation of legislation promoting equality between the sexes and strategies for the advancement of women in political life. All those issues would be the focus of attention in the next millennium.

122. She expressed satisfaction at the recognition on the part of delegations of the necessity and value of national action plans and strategies for implementing the critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action and priorities at the national level. The information on such plans and programmes was extremely important for the high-level review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform that would take place in 2000. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/231, the Secretariat was preparing, in consultation with the regional commissions, a questionnaire to be submitted to Governments in the framework of the reports on the implementation of the Beijing Platform. She looked forward to receiving the responses of Governments to the questionnaire.

123. She was encouraged by the significant support expressed for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the draft Optional Protocol thereto, and hoped that the Protocol would be adopted during the session of the Open-ended Working Group to be held in March 1999. She had also noted with great interest the comments on how reporting under the Convention had generated new actions at the national level in several countries; such examples were important in demonstrating the practical application of international treaties.

124. She expressed appreciation for the support shown by Member States for equitable gender distribution of posts in the United Nations Secretariat. In that connection, a number of bold steps were being taken to improve the situation. With regard to the question of violence against women, she thanked those delegations which had spoken in favour of including gender-based violence, especially in times of armed conflict, in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. Some States had expressed great concern at the continuing incidents of sexual violence against women. She also took note with appreciation of those countries which had expressed their support for efforts to eradicate trafficking in women and for the elimination of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls at the national and international levels.

The meeting rose at 6.30 p.m.