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Chairman: Mr. Galluska (Czech Republic)**Contents**Agenda item 109: Advancement of women (*continued*)Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women

(continued) (A/54/3, 38/Rev.1(Suppl.), 98, A/54/123-E/1999/66, A/54/124, A/54/156-E/1999/102, A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1, A/54/224, 225, 341, 342, 352, 405)

Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (continued)
(A/54/124, 264, 354)

1. **Ms. Chong** (Brunei Darussalam) commended the United Nations on its prominent role in addressing women's issues, citing in particular the contributions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

2. Rural women had been particularly affected by the volatile financial markets resulting from globalization, as highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General on improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/54/123-E/1999/66). It was therefore to be hoped that the special session of the General Assembly to be held in the year 2000 to measure the degree of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action would help to improve national programmes.

3. **Ms. Nyamsuren** (Mongolia) said that her country attached great importance to the upcoming special session, which should be the occasion for reaffirming international political commitment to the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Human Development Reports prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would, in addition, serve as useful guidelines for defining new initiatives in the spirit of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Mongolia supported the work of the Commission on the Status of Women and of the Economic and Social Council in implementing the Platform for Action. It also welcomed the Council's adoption of the ministerial communiqué on employment, poverty alleviation and the empowerment and advancement of women.

4. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women both Governments and non-governmental organizations had stepped up activities on behalf of women. In Mongolia, the national preparatory committee for the Beijing Conference had been transformed into the Mongolian National Committee for the Implementation of the Decisions of the

Beijing Conference, and a National Programme for the Advancement of Women had been created. Their priorities were to alleviate the poverty of women, enhance social protections and the social security safety net, improve well-being within the family, strengthen bonds between older and younger generations, and ensure respect for human rights and freedoms. The Programme's goal was to create equal opportunities for women in the areas of peace, health, education, decision-making and participation in political, social and economic life. In addition, Mongolia's population policy sought to ensure their participation in development. The Mongolian National Poverty Alleviation Programme also emphasized the principle of gender equality.

5. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/123), which rightly pointed out that women's participation in the agricultural sector was under-reported, and agreed that further comparative research on that issue was greatly needed. Women made up 50.4 per cent of the total 2.4 million population of Mongolia and 45.1 per cent of the female population lived in rural areas and led a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life. The transition to a market economy had brought opportunities and challenges for the rural population, especially for women. The privatization of livestock had turned herdsmen into owners, improving their economic status. On the other hand, the dismantling of the Government-subsidized social safety net had negatively affected conditions of life. A survey of living standards conducted in 1997 had estimated that over 25 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line, mostly in rural areas.

6. The Government was therefore taking measures to distribute livestock to poor rural families, especially households headed by women. Furthermore, non-governmental organizations were also focusing their efforts on improving the economic viability of rural women; the Women's Federation of Mongolia had, for example, set up microcredit funds in all 21 provinces. Projects had been launched on information supply, training, microcredit and employment, and 586 new jobs had been created.

7. Mongolia welcomed the strong international commitment to the empowerment of women and intended to sponsor a draft resolution on the situation of rural women.

8. **Ms. Pokharel** (Nepal) said that her Government associated itself with the statement presented by Guyana speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Nepal welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women

(A/54/264) and acknowledged the efforts of the United Nations system to contribute to women's empowerment with a view to achieving sustainable human development and enforcing human rights.

9. Nepal had recently submitted its initial report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and viewed the adoption of the Optional Protocol as a milestone in the protection and strengthening of women's rights. It was encouraging both governmental and non-governmental bodies to make special efforts to prevent all forms of violence against women. It urged the international community to provide support for the rehabilitation of refugee women, displaced women, and women who had been victims of violence. Furthermore, Nepal was determined to work with other countries to combat trafficking in women and children in South Asia, and anticipated that a regional convention on that subject would be adopted at the upcoming summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

10. In Nepal, the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare was aiming in particular to resolve the educational gender gap through programmes designed to increase women's access to formal and non-formal education, and was considering the establishment of a women's commission. Non-governmental organizations as well as private and social associations had also been deeply involved in improving the status of Nepalese women by creating an environment that would encourage their participation in national and local decision-making. The Constitution stipulated that within each political party, 5 per cent of the candidates for seats in the House of Representatives must be women; an electoral provision likewise established that 20 per cent of elected posts at the local level must be reserved for women. Nepal was committed to integrating women into all aspects of national development over the long term.

11. **Ms. Blajan** (Romania) said that her Government associated itself with the statement made by Finland on behalf of the European Union. In the view of Romania, the Fourth World Conference on Women had had a great impact on government policies and on the activities of international organizations in the development of new strategies and solutions for the realization of women's equality and human rights. The special session should provide an excellent opportunity to assess the implementation of the Beijing commitments, and should give new impetus to national efforts to overcome obstacles. In that connection, her delegation welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol which should, in its view, enhance

the capacity of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to fulfil its mandate.

12. Romania had taken firm steps to fulfil the commitments it had undertaken in Beijing, and planned to present a detailed account of women's advancement and gender equality policies during the consideration of its fourth periodic report to CEDAW in June 2000.

13. The Romanian authorities had elaborated, and had begun to implement, a national action plan the main objectives of which were to create and develop institutional machinery for policy coordination in the area of women's advancement; to improve the economic situation of women; to equalize their access to the labour market, better their working conditions, and enhance their control and use of economic resources; to prevent and control violence against women and children; and to integrate the concept of gender equality into all areas of social, cultural and educational life. A national mechanism had been created to implement those goals at the governmental and parliamentary levels. The work of the Romanian Ombudsman on behalf of children, women and families was expected to contribute to the success of those efforts.

14. Two significant new laws had been drafted and were currently on the parliamentary agenda: the first provided for equal opportunities for women, prohibited sex-based labour discrimination, defined and prohibited sexual harassment, and established conditions for job advertising and acquisition; the second provided for paternal leave, with a view to equalizing the participation of fathers in taking care of newborns, and promoted the principles of shared involvement in family life and shared responsibility for the rearing and educating of children.

15. With the valuable support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Government had also established a programme on women's right to health in the workplace and to reproductive health, and had taken measures to combat violence against women within the context of a broader strategy designed to control violence, especially in the home. In addition, in close collaboration with human rights non-governmental organizations, it had set up a pilot centre to assist and protect victims of family violence. It had found that cooperation between Government and social organizations was crucial in addressing discriminatory practices against women.

16. Romania valued its cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Commission on the Status of Women, CEDAW, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the International

Training and Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). It was convinced that the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action required close collaboration between Governments, civil societies, international organizations, and the United Nations system. In that regard, the "Women 2000" special session of the General Assembly should provide the occasion for the international community to work together to achieve full respect for women's rights.

17. **Ms. Leonce-Caryl** (Saint Lucia), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that it associated itself with the statement presented by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had, however, met with less success than had been desired. Women, who made up the greater percentage of the population and the work force, bore the brunt of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and other social ills. Seventy per cent of the world's poor were women.

18. In order to implement the twelve critical areas of concern, CARICOM had chosen to focus its subregional efforts on specific areas of the Platform for Action: women and poverty, education, health, and violence against women. Efforts to combat the problem of poverty were hardened by a lack of data. As the Platform for Action contended, poverty could not be eradicated without access of all women to resources, opportunities and public services. Realizing that education for the economic and social development of women was also significant, educational and training programmes for women and girls were being conducted throughout the subregion. Measures were also being taken to formulate national domestic violence policies, which called for training programmes for police, lawyers, social workers, the clergy, and health-care workers. Most CARICOM countries had signed and ratified both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-American Convention on the Eradication, Punishment and Prevention of Violence against Women. CARICOM welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the first-mentioned Convention and supported its early entry into force.

19. For the implementation process to move forward, remedies must be found for the widening gap between developed and developing countries. In the latter, poverty and unemployment were increasing, life expectancy was dropping, and social problems like teenage pregnancy, prostitution and illiteracy were on the rise. In the view of CARICOM, the Platform for Action failed to deal adequately with the impact of globalization and of social,

cultural, gender and developmental policies on women's lives.

20. **Mr. Zmeevsky** (Russian Federation) said that there had been many positive developments since the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). The realization of women's rights, the attainment of gender equality and the implementation of the commitments made at Beijing were viewed as priorities by the international community. The idea of integrating the gender factor in all spheres of United Nations activities had become a reality. His delegation welcomed, in particular, the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Russian Federation had participated actively in the drafting of the Optional Protocol and looked forward to its rapid entry into force.

21. As a result of globalization, the current financial crisis had affected the entire world economy. Developing countries and countries with economies in transition had been particularly hard hit, and, within those countries, women had suffered most. In the Russian Federation, the crisis had led to the decline of production and sharp increases in unemployment and inflation. His Government was seeking to mitigate the social cost of the crisis by increasing social assistance to teachers, doctors and other public-sector workers, most of whom were women, and by taking steps to ensure regular payment of the child benefit. In the light of the impact of the crisis, the Russian Federation was proposing that the international community should consider establishing a mechanism to manage the process of globalization.

22. The international community must make a concerted effort to combat the problem of female poverty. Countries with economies in transition required international support for job creation programmes targeted at women and initiatives aimed at promoting female entrepreneurship and enhancing women's managerial skills. The Russian Federation had welcomed the inclusion of recommendations in the ministerial communiqué on the role of employment and work in poverty eradication: the empowerment and advancement of women adopted at the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council's substantive session of 1999 that addressed the social and economic problems facing women in those countries.

23. Regrettably, the number of women in the world affected by armed conflicts and other crises had not diminished. High priority must be given to preventive diplomacy and measures to avert humanitarian catastrophes. At the same time, initiatives to minimize

human suffering must be undertaken in a manner consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of international law and sanctions regimes should in future take account of the adverse impact of sanctions on women and other vulnerable groups.

24. The Russian Federation hoped that the special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" would result in a broad consensus regarding the steps needed to build on the strategies agreed at the Beijing Conference to promote the advancement of women. It had welcomed the balanced resolution on the organizational aspects of the preparations for the special session adopted by the preparatory committee in March. It was concerned, however, that work on the text of the concluding documents of the special session had yet to begin and that the modalities for participation by non-governmental organizations had not been determined. The successful outcome of the special session would make an important contribution to the full realization of women's rights.

25. **Mr. Cherif** (Tunisia) said that his delegation was gratified by the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It was concerned, however, that the progress made towards the realization of the goals articulated at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) had been uneven. Women's plight was most acute in regions afflicted by poverty, illiteracy and marginalization. His delegation was convinced that social and economic development and the advancement of women went hand in hand and that women could act as catalysts for development. The international community also had a role to play by supporting developing countries in establishing an environment conducive to the fight against poverty.

26. His Government was committed to the promotion of women's rights. Under the revised Constitution, the principles of equality and non-discrimination on grounds of gender were guaranteed. The Code on Personal Status and the Nationality, Labour and Penal Codes had been amended so as to eliminate all provisions that discriminated against women. His Government sought, in its approach to women's rights, to preserve the traditional cultural values that were central to Tunisian identity, while embracing the universal human values that characterized modern society.

27. Within the framework of its educational reforms, his Government had taken a number of measures to cut drop-

out rates among girls. It was also seeking to increase the number of young women receiving vocational training. Various initiatives had been undertaken to enhance women's social and economic integration, and reproductive health care had been made an integral part of basic health services.

28. In order to address the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action, his Government had established a number of priorities, including the strengthening of women's economic potential, the reduction of female poverty and the improvement of women's living conditions, the elimination of gender stereotypes, the protection of the girl child, the enhancement of women's participation in their communities, the protection of women migrants, the development of statistics disaggregated by gender, and the building of international cooperation.

29. **Mr. Manele** (Solomon Islands) said that, under the Constitution, fundamental rights and freedoms were guaranteed to all citizens of the Solomon Islands irrespective of gender. Most women, however, were unaware of their legal rights, and their political participation was low. Those problems must be addressed in order to enable women to contribute to decision-making and to the country's overall development.

30. More than 80 per cent of Solomon Islands women lived in rural areas and were engaged in subsistence farming and fishing. Major obstacles to women's advancement were low literacy rates among females (17 per cent) and low school enrolment figures. His Government therefore accorded high priority to education and human resources development, strongly supported the proposed launching of a United Nations decade to eradicate illiteracy and looked forward to the World Education Forum to be held in Senegal in April 2000 and to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to give substance to those international initiatives at the national and regional levels.

31. His Government had recently adopted a national women's policy. The Division of Women and Development in the Ministry of Youth, Women and Sports and the National Council of Women, which were the main implementing agencies, would work in partnership with civil society, including non-governmental organizations in general and church groups in particular. In the Solomon Islands, church women's groups provided the only formal assistance available to many women, especially those living in rural areas.

32. Lack of resources and weak coordination were the major obstacles to the effective and timely implementation of national women's programmes. Capacity-building through training and education was critical. There was also a need to raise awareness among women of regional and international programmes of action. His delegation wished to acknowledge, in that connection, the assistance of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) in conducting the National Training Seminar on Women, Environmental Management and Sustainable Development in August 1998 in Honiara. INSTRAW's current financial difficulties must receive the support necessary to enable it to expand its activities and it must be addressed.

33. The Solomon Islands was committed to the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The adoption of its national women's policy had been a positive step in that direction. Given the limited national capacity in the areas of data collection and analysis, the Solomon Islands would require technical assistance from the Secretariat to enable it to fulfil its reporting obligations under article 18 of the Convention.

34. **Ms. Ramirez** (Argentina) said that her delegation associated itself, first and foremost, with the statement presented by Mexico on behalf of the countries of the Rio Group, and in particular with its remarks on preparations for both the special session of the General Assembly and the Eighth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean.

35. Her Government noted that the Argentine public lacked a clear awareness of the power relationships between men and women, and in particular, of the obstacles blocking their participation on a par with men in the production process and in the distribution of wealth. Her Government hoped that the question of the elimination of traditional and cultural stereotypes which impeded women's access to leadership positions would be vigorously addressed during the "Women 2000" special session.

36. The financial crisis confronting the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) had necessitated drastic decisions, among them the closing of the New York liaison office. Argentina supported the economic restructuring of the Institute because it would improve its efficiency and help to surmount the crisis. INSTRAW was the only institution devoted to investigation and training in the area of women's advancement; it should not be dismantled for financial reasons.

37. Under the terms of the Platform for Action, UNIFEM had the task of increasing options and possibilities for the economic and political development of women. To that end, it had strengthened its links with other bodies and was offering technical assistance at both the regional and international levels. For two decades, it had supported innovative and experimental activities that benefited women in over 65 countries. The Argentine Liaison project, for example, had set up an information network for official institutions and civil associations, with a view to democratizing and streamlining the flow of information into and out of the country.

38. The great challenge of the twenty-first century was to overcome the practical obstacles to the advancement of women and to combat age-old discriminatory patterns affecting women not only as individuals but as a group by instituting specially designed educational campaigns. Argentina applauded the recent adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention and supported its rapid entry into force.

39. The Argentine delegation hoped that the Ad Hoc Committee responsible for formulating an international convention against organized international crime would also draft a protocol on the traffic in women and children. Argentina had actively participated in that undertaking and would continue to do so. The Government also hoped that the coming century would bring with it the continuing advancement of women within the Secretariat.

40. **Mr. Akinsanya** (Nigeria) said that his delegation wished to align itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The recent adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would provide women throughout the world with an effective mechanism for the protection of their rights under that instrument. Nigeria had ratified the Convention in 1985 without reservation. Since the presentation to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of Nigeria's combined second and third periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention in 1998, his Government had taken steps to address the problems identified by the Committee, in particular the persistence of harmful traditional practices that affected the health of Nigerian women and girls.

41. His Government had established a new Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Youth Development, headed by a female Minister, to enhance coordination on women's programmes. In addition, there were Ministries

of Women's Affairs in each division of the country which worked with non-governmental organizations on gender issues. Some division workshops had been organized to develop strategies for the implementation of the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), while the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs had published simplified manuals on the 12 critical areas of concern set out in the Platform for Action.

42. Other measures to promote the advancement of women included the broadcast of a video on the problems of early marriage; the relaunching of the universal basic education scheme; improved access to health care for expectant mothers; the dissemination of information on family planning and child-spacing with a view to improving the overall health and quality of life of women; and the raising of awareness through posters, leaflets and media discussion of the need to elevate the status of the girl child.

43. With the recent transition to democratic rule in Nigeria and with women already occupying leadership positions in the private sector, there had been an appreciable increase in the number of women appointed to high-level posts in Government and elected to representative organs.

44. The special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 should highlight the progress made since the Fourth World Conference on Women and identify further initiatives that would advance the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The adoption of a short visionary declaration reaffirming the commitment of the international community to the Platform would give renewed impetus to that process.

45. **Ms. Aftab** (Pakistan) said that notwithstanding some positive trends, women continued to be victims of discrimination and violence both within the family and in society at large, and their contribution to society remained largely unrecognized. They constituted the majority of the world's poor, and two thirds of the world's illiterates, making them vulnerable to exploitation. Their plight was even worse in situations of armed conflict. Rape had been used as a weapon of war in Africa and in the Balkans, and was being used in Kashmir even now. The international community must condemn India's barbarity in Kashmir.

46. Pakistan had finalized its national plan of action, which covered all 12 critical areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action and had been developed with the participation of non-governmental organizations, women's organizations and social scientists. Under that plan, the

Ministry of Women and Development would coordinate the efforts of provincial women's development departments and other agencies to encourage the participation of women at all levels. The plan focused on universal access to education with the aim of achieving 100 per cent school enrolment and eliminating the gender gap by 2003. Job generation and the creation of a conducive environment for business opportunities were regarded as the best tools to overcome the feminization of poverty. Another priority was universal access to basic health care including reproductive health care, particularly in rural areas. The latest statistics indicated that child mortality for girls had improved over the past decade. A campaign had been launched to educate the public about the social costs of violence against women, and to educate women about action to be taken against offenders. Crisis centres for victims of violence had been established in all major cities. In addition to programmes to promote social awareness about women's rights, the Government was engaged in a continuous process of reviewing discriminatory legislation.

47. **Mr. Augustus** (Rwanda) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

48. Women constituted the backbone of the Rwandan economy, which was mainly based on agriculture: 97 per cent of women depended on farming for their subsistence. Some 60 per cent of women were widows. Women and girls had suffered the worst atrocities during the 1994 genocide, and many who had witnessed and endured rape, torture and brutality were still traumatized. Many households were now headed by widows who lived in abject poverty. The Ministry of Gender, with a woman at the helm, in collaboration with the World Health Organization and friendly countries, had undertaken the rehabilitation of the victims of rape and was providing medical assistance and trauma counselling. Resources were urgently required to provide shelter, support and income-generating activities for women, as well as legal representation to secure their rights.

49. Women were well represented in the legislative and judicial systems and in key posts in government and the Parliament was currently working on a bill to amend the inheritance and land ownership laws so as to eliminate discrimination against women. The Government had supported the establishment of a women's communal fund, which targeted poor women who did not have access to bank loans, and had set up a guarantee fund for middle class women through a commercial bank, giving priority to projects offering employment to women.

50. His Government had established women's councils providing a forum for women to participate in all areas of national development and accelerate their empowerment. It was establishing popular tribunals which would enable the local population to participate in the adjudication of genocide cases and crimes against humanity committed in Rwanda; 30 per cent of the members of the tribunals would be women.

51. **Mr. Suh Dae-won** (Republic of Korea) said that despite some gains, women were still encountering numerous obstacles, including those engendered by economic crises and conflict situations. Governments and civil society must form a partnership in applying new codes of conduct and behaviour. Political will and commitment were essential to all initiatives for the equal treatment of women and gender mainstreaming. In that connection, his delegation noted with satisfaction that the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific planned to organize a high-level intergovernmental meeting in Bangkok in October 1999 to review the regional implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

52. His Government was formulating policies with a special emphasis on women's rights and empowerment. In 1999, it had enacted the gender discrimination and relief act, which prohibited gender discrimination in employment, education, the use of services and facilities, and the application of laws and regulations, and provided for investigation and corrective measures. It had enacted other laws to further strengthen the enabling environment for Korean women to participate in economic activities.

53. **Ms. Odera** (Kenya) said that her delegation fully associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

54. The women's bureau, which was the government agency for women in Kenya, had initiated the process of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by distributing a training manual to promote gender sensitization at the district level and help formulate district specific action plans. In December 1997, a national conference to review progress had revealed that major obstacles continued to impede implementation.

55. The women's bureau was in the process of preparing a national policy document on gender and development and had taken an active role in promoting gender mainstreaming in the public sector by holding seminars for leaders of government ministries.

56. The bureau was currently developing gender monitoring indicators for the implementation of the Platform for Action. As more and more gender disaggregated data became available, it had become clear that women were critical to national development endeavours. Statistics showed that female-headed households constituted 47 per cent of the rural and 29 per cent of the urban population living below the poverty line, and that women represented a disproportionate share of the agricultural labour force, but controlled only 38 per cent of its operations. Unfortunately, the participation of women in decision-making had not matched the widespread democratization which was under way in Kenya: women represented only a small percentage of members of parliament and administrators, although there had been a slight increase in the number of women in the judiciary. The disaggregated data put her Government in a better position to assess gender disparities, target interventions and monitor the impact of policies. All statistics pointed to the need to involve women in every aspect of sustainable development. Despite overwhelming obstacles, women continued to play major productive roles in both the formal and particularly the informal sectors.

57. Kenya expected that the implementation of the recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development through the national poverty eradication plan would enhance the advancement of women, particularly if the targets in the fields of education, health and poverty were met. However, any further action would hinge on its ability to mobilize resources and strengthen capacity-building at the local, national and international levels.

58. **Ms. Afifi** (Morocco) said that while strategies for gender equality had unquestionably brought about progress in the affluent societies, in poor societies like those in Africa, where socio-economic problems were particularly acute, the situation of women was alarming: poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and associated ills had further marginalized women and deprived them of their most elementary rights.

59. Morocco had made constant efforts to achieve harmonious development and remedy social disparities in the status of men and women. In particular, the Government had organized a national campaign to combat violence against women, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations. Despite sociocultural and historical obstacles, Morocco was implementing a national strategy aimed at the integration of women into development and the national plan of action adopted in March 1999 reflected all the objectives identified in the Beijing Platform for Action. Women were now present in

all areas of national life, including key posts with responsibility in the legislative, executive and judicial spheres.

60. **Ms. Joseph** (Sri Lanka) welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and expressed her delegation's hope that Member States would proceed to its early ratification.

61. As mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/123-E/1999/66), globalization and declining international cooperation in development had exacerbated the marginalization of rural women in developing countries. Her delegation therefore particularly supported the recommendations contained in paragraph 79 of the report. The special needs of elderly women in rural areas also deserved attention.

62. At the national level, the Sri Lankan Government wished to draw attention to the establishment of a number of government mechanisms dealing with child protection, migrant women, women in free trade zones, population and reproductive health, and tobacco and alcohol, as well as a mobile service catering for problems of rural women. The Women's Committee responsible for the implementation of a Women's Charter modelled on the Convention was involved, *inter alia*, in reviewing legislation and conducting gender sensitization programmes for civil servants. It had also established a mechanism for receiving complaints of discrimination; judicial redress would be further facilitated by a law on equal opportunities which the Government was proposing to enact.

63. The Ministry of Women's Affairs, was responsible for implementing Sri Lanka's national plan of action for furthering the goals of the Beijing Conference and had established focal points in other ministries to monitor gender mainstreaming in government policy. The Ministry was supported in its work by United Nations agencies and bilateral donors, and had recently received a pledge of substantial financial backing from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

64. Concerned that the plight of women migrant workers was being overlooked, her delegation expressed the hope that the requisite number of countries would ratify the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in order that it might come into force by the year 2000.

65. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the rights-based

approach adopted by UNICEF required enhanced analytical and programming skills to assess root causes of problems facing women and children as well as a better understanding of the linkages between their problems and the human, financial and organizational resources needed to resolve them. The specific commitments from developing countries and the donor community to expand basic social services called for at the international meeting on the 20/20 initiative held at Hanoi were essential to realizing the goals set at Beijing and Cairo.

66. UNICEF saw the expansion of girls' education as the key to fulfilling the rights of girls and women. The Fund had been collaborating in efforts not only to improve access to schools, but also to remove underlying structural defects rooted in gender discrimination and inequality. In the area of maternal mortality, UNICEF was working with its partners — notably the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) — to promote women-friendly health services and an enabling environment for change.

67. For the Beijing and Cairo goals to be achieved, it was necessary to break the "conspiracy of silence" surrounding HIV/AIDS and its impact on past gains in women's health and development. Thus far, the pandemic had caused 8 million children to be orphaned; the figure was likely to rise to 40 million by the year 2000. Moreover, women disproportionately shared the burden of that tragedy. With a view to effecting the necessary changes in behaviour and practice, UNICEF had been fostering close partnerships with community groups, families, young people, care providers and those with HIV/AIDS.

68. It was important to be mindful of the many challenges which lay ahead. As many as 600 thousand women continued to die each year in pregnancy, and 600 million women were illiterate. All Member States must be urged not only to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to withdraw reservations as a matter of urgency, but also to translate international commitments into action. Strong partnerships between United Nations agencies, civil society and Governments had been proved crucial to the effectiveness of interventions. In that connection, the judicial colloquium being convened in Vienna by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) was most welcome.

69. UNICEF was also involved at regional and national levels in preparing for the special session of the General Assembly and planned to convene special events at that session on themes relating to gender equality. UNICEF had

also focused on capacity-building for gender mainstreaming and had developed gender focal point networks in all regions. Furthermore, UNICEF had issued a guide on gender mainstreaming throughout the programme cycle in line with the Secretary-General's call for specific strategies to be developed in that area. Greater attention was also being paid to the adults of the future through interventions in early childhood to ensure gender equality, with the role of parents and the community increasingly being highlighted.

70. **Ms. Gertrudis-Davis** (Equatorial Guinea) said that her Government had established a Ministry of Social Affairs and the Status of Women, headed by women, to improve the situation of the family and ensure the participation of women in decision-making. Women were now a major presence in the legislature and the judiciary, and participated actively in the national armed forces. Progress was often hindered by lack of resources, however, and by sociocultural difficulties inherited from the past.

71. The 1997-2001 medium-term economic strategy covered three main areas: health, education, and the economic sector. The objectives were to achieve nutritional coverage of the most vulnerable sector, reduce maternal and infant mortality, and ensure the supply of clean drinking water; eliminate female illiteracy in rural areas and provide vocational training in urban areas, and educate women about their rights; and reduce poverty, provide small loans to women's rural cooperatives, and increase employment. Various non-governmental organizations were working with the Government to achieve those goals in the social sector.

72. **Mr. Bhattacharjee** (India), said that his delegation wished to associate itself fully with the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The adoption of the Optional Protocol represented an important milestone in the advancement of women. India also strongly supported the revitalization of INSTRAW.

73. At the national level, his Government was committed to improving the status of women and had prioritized the girl child. A number of institutional mechanisms existed for promoting women's rights in line with international human rights instruments, *inter alia*, a Department of Women and Child Development which gave particular attention to rural women; a National Commission for Women which revised legislation, addressed allegations of discrimination and provided an umbrella for policy formulation based on international human rights instruments; a Parliamentary Committee for the Empowerment of Women which monitored gender

mainstreaming; a national women's fund which provided credits and grants to impoverished women in the informal sector; and a Central Social Welfare Board which worked through more than a thousand voluntary organizations.

74. As part of efforts to combat violence against women, women cells had been established in police stations and women's participation in law enforcement had been upgraded. At the village level, gender-specific social support services had become widespread. Women's empowerment featured prominently in the Government's five-year plan. In central government, there were now significant numbers of women ministers. Large numbers of female candidates had been elected to manage village affairs — a development unthinkable earlier. Indeed, public awareness was growing that even rural women had their rights, duties and responsibilities. Given that India resided in its villages, his delegation welcomed the concerns expressed by the Secretary-General in his report on rural women (A/54/123-E/1999/66).

75. On the negative side, globalization was only increasing marginalization of the poor, accentuating income disparities, eroding job security and affecting access to health services and education. Moreover, the growing insecurity of communities carried the potential to disintegrate whole societies. In developing countries particularly, the likely impact on women's advancement, of bleak economic growth prospects, environmental degradation and pressure on land was a further cause for alarm. The worst casualties would be health (particularly reproductive health), hygiene and education.

76. If the social development agenda did not succeed, the advancement of women would be at stake. Similarly, without accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, no social development or integration could take place. The impact of globalization was such that transnational corporations whose offshore activities offered job opportunities for women insisted on investment conditions which diluted social standards and subverted local laws protecting the rights of the individual. Developing countries could not hope to create an enabling environment for women's rights when the international environment worked against them. In that context, international cooperation was crucial.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.