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**Third Committee****Summary record of the 9th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 15 October 2012, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Šćepanović (Vice-Chair) ..... (Montenegro)**Contents**

Agenda item 28: Advancement of women

- (a) Advancement of women
- (b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

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*In the absence of Mr. Mac-Donald (Suriname), Chair, Ms. Šćepanović (Montenegro), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

**Agenda item 28: Advancement of women (A/67/220 and 227)**

**(a) Advancement of women (A/67/38, A/67/170, A/67/258)**

**(b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/67/185 and A/67/347)**

1. **Ms. Wu Yan** (China) said that China endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendation that gender equality and the empowerment of women should be incorporated in the post-2015 development framework. Gender equality and the improvement of women's status benefited women themselves and had a major impact on world peace and development. Much progress had been made in recent years, with many Governments incorporating the outcomes of the Beijing Declaration and the twenty-third session of the General Assembly into national legislation. The concept of gender equality had gradually found its way into the process of Government decision-making, leading to an improvement in women's living conditions.

2. Nevertheless, the impact of the international financial crisis continued to be felt primarily by women, and the feminization of poverty was increasingly noticeable. Gender discrimination was still widespread and domestic violence and trafficking of women and girls occurred despite efforts to eliminate them. Natural disasters, the digital divide and inadequate public services profoundly affected women's development.

3. The question of how to raise the status of women had become an urgent matter that required careful consideration by the United Nations and the international community. Governments, particularly in developing countries, should help women to overcome the disproportionate effect of the financial crisis by providing access to education, training, employment, health services and legal advice.

4. China endorsed the efforts of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of

Women (UN-Women) to adhere to the principle of national ownership while increasing its support for women in developing countries. Developed countries should scale up their technical assistance and financial support in developing countries so that women could become both the beneficiaries and drivers of human progress. Focused efforts were needed to tackle the problems faced by rural women and their role and contribution should be given greater importance. The Government of China had made gains in that area through the provision of small loans, creating bases for the demonstration of agricultural and forestry technology and enhancing women's participation in management at the grassroots level.

5. Women's development and empowerment were mutually reinforcing and interdependent. Governments should take a comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming and integrate the empowerment of women in their overall strategies for economic, political and social development. China had integrated the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action into national strategies: it had outlined plans for the period 2011-2020 which covered the areas of women's health and education, economic and political participation, social security, the environment and law. China also attached great importance to international cooperation; in addition to having hosted the Fourth World Conference on Women and commemorated its tenth anniversary, it had also hosted an International Forum on Women and Sustainable Development in 2011. China was willing to enhance dialogue with interested parties in the interests of improving the rights and status of women.

6. **Mr. Valero** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that, throughout history, women had sought freedom and fulfillment of their human rights. The Constitution of the Republic of Venezuela guaranteed the rights and dignity of women and the Government recognized that domestic work generated wealth and social well-being. Venezuela had established a ministry for women and a number of other agencies and programmes to benefit them directly; a law had been passed on the right of women to a life free from violence. The participation of women in political life was unprecedented: women held three of the five highest offices in the country.

7. A holistic approach was taken to life-long health care for women, focusing on quality of life and including sexual and reproductive health. The country

was taking preventive action and was engaged in international cooperation concerning trafficking of women.

8. Despite the progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the feminization of poverty remained a sad reality. The economic and financial crisis had impacted the advancement of women, especially in developing countries where unequal terms of trade, the food crisis, trade barriers and an increase in foreign debt had deprived them of the resources needed to attend to the social agenda and the needs of women. In addition, his Government condemned the wars and neo-colonial occupations which violated the human rights of thousands of women and girls and caused them physical, sexual and psychological suffering. Venezuela called for the highest priority to be given to the rights, equality and dignity of women in public policy making.

9. **Ms. Hernando** (Philippines) expressed support for the work being undertaken by UN-Women in strengthening the ability of the United Nations to promote and mainstream gender equality and the empowerment of women. Although efforts for the advancement of women had increased, progress had been uneven and the prevalence of violence against women remained high. Member States were strengthening national and legal policy frameworks; enhancing prevention measures and data collection systems and facilitating cooperation, yet the obstacles to curbing violence against women remained as a result of underreporting of incidents, insufficient enforcement of legislation, limited resources to implement laws, policies and programmes and insufficient monitoring of their impact. Moreover, the global financial, economic, food and energy crises had caused significant setbacks in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

10. Against that backdrop, she called for greater commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which served as the most comprehensive global policy framework for the full realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The Philippines hoped for a productive and successful outcome for the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women and its priority theme: “elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”. It was essential that

the session should produce concrete recommendations for action by Governments and other national and international stakeholders.

11. The advancement of women and gender equality were integral to progress in the Philippines. The Constitution recognized the role of women in nation-building and ensured their equality, while a legal framework protected and promoted gender equality and the empowerment of women. The State was mandated to develop policies and programmes to address discrimination and inequality in the economic, political social and cultural life of women and men. Moreover, the Philippines had been among the first to ratify the International Labour Organization Convention concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers.

12. Migration was a major feature of society in the Philippines since one tenth of the population lived outside its borders. While it broadened economic opportunities and promoted independence, migration also made workers vulnerable to violence and abuse. The Philippines thus advocated for the adoption of targeted measures to address the exploitation of migrant workers, especially women and girls.

13. Noting the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on disability to be held in September 2013, she welcomed the report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (A/67/227), with its focus on violence against women with disabilities. She was encouraged by the growing attention given to the situation of persons with disabilities, particularly women and children.

14. **Ms. Phipps** (United States of America) said that empowering women was a priority in her country’s foreign policy and international development efforts. She was pleased that the Committee’s resolution under the present agenda item would focus on violence against women and that the Commission on the Status of Women would address the topic at its next session. Gender-based violence against women and girls cut across ethnicity, race, class, religion, educational level and international borders. One in three women worldwide would face gender-based violence, including rape as a weapon of war, so-called “honour killings” and dowry-related murder. An estimated 10 million girls each year were married before the age of 18; they were deprived of education and economic empowerment opportunities and were more vulnerable

to violence and poor health outcomes. Between 2 and 3 million girls each year were subjected to genital mutilation and millions of women were bought and sold into prostitution, or forced to work as indentured servants or sweat shop workers.

15. The United States was committed to combating violence against women through a new, comprehensive strategy launched in 2012. Her delegation shared many of the approaches recommended in the reports of the Secretary-General on trafficking in persons (A/67/170) and on ending female genital mutilation (E/CN.6/2012/8). In its global efforts to combat human trafficking, the United States took as its guide the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol) and it urged other Member States to do the same. The Government was funding projects to protect survivors; it had also strengthened its zero-tolerance policy on human trafficking in Federal contracts overseas. Those measures helped to address concerns that businesses might be linked to trafficking in sectors where migrants were exploited through unscrupulous recruitment systems. The United States also shared the Secretary-General's emphasis on the importance of a strong law enforcement response in order to combat human trafficking. It was committed to strengthening training and harnessing technology in order to improve the response of law enforcement officials, to ensure that inspectors and educators were able to spot the signs of trafficking and to provide young people with better tools so that they could avoid online trafficking predators.

16. The United States was helping countries to respond to female genital mutilation; it had supported the establishment of a Kenya centre of excellence at Nairobi University, which carried out medical training and supported education and research across Africa, helping to strengthen the base of people committed to ending the practice. Her Government was also supporting projects at the country level, which took cultural sensitivities into account and which were integrated with health, economics, democracy and governance programmes.

17. Ending violence and the threat of violence against women must be made central to initiatives to empower them, since it prevented women from participating fully in their societies and therefore inhibited economic

prosperity and good governance. The United States, along with 12 other founding members, had launched the Equal Futures Partnership, to institute legal, regulatory and policy reforms that would advance women's political and economic participation, and address the issue of violence against women and girls.

18. Reproductive rights and sexual and reproductive health services were another critical aspect of women's empowerment, including universal access to reproductive health and family planning services. The United States was committed to improving the availability and quality of maternal health care, including by addressing obstetric fistula. Her Government had been deeply disappointed that the Commission on the Status of Women and Rio Conference on Sustainable Development had not included language on reproductive rights in their outcome documents. The Cairo Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action enshrined the principle of reproductive rights, and she hoped that language reaffirming them would be adopted in future United Nations deliberations.

19. **Mr. Bichet** (Switzerland) said that women's empowerment could only be achieved by combating the deep causes of inequality: discrimination, violence against women and gender stereotyping. Switzerland appealed to all Member States to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and to increase their contributions to UN-omen. In order for women to achieve equality with men, they would need economic empowerment; education for girls was essential to achieve that aim. Women and girls needed access to sexual and reproductive health services: their right to family planning; contraception and sex education should be respected. Reproductive rights should be guaranteed for female victims of rape in conflict or post-conflict situations.

20. Empowerment of women and girls was also hindered by such harmful traditional practices as genital mutilation, child marriage and early and forced marriage. Those practices resulted in serious health problems and prevented girls from completing their education. Forced marriage and female genital mutilation were practices that stemmed from inequality between men and women; they were forms of gender-based violence and discrimination. Although Switzerland had passed a law in 2012 that made female genital mutilation a criminal offence, it would also

combat the practice through prevention and awareness-raising campaigns.

21. Lack of support for the victims of gender-based violence and the impunity accorded to the perpetrators were obstacles to women's empowerment. Switzerland reminded Member States of their obligation to investigate and prosecute offences in order to end impunity, and encouraged contributions to the Trust Fund for Victims established by the International Criminal Court.

22. **Mr. Santos de Oliveira** (Brazil) said that more than half of Brazilians living in poverty were women and they were the most affected by lack of resources and access to public services. However, the situation was changing and women were now the main beneficiaries of cash transfer programmes and housing credit. More than 30 per cent of professionals providing technical assistance in rural areas were women and Brazil had co-sponsored the Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women launched by UN-Women. Income distribution for children and for pregnant and breastfeeding women had been prioritized.

23. Brazil had implemented policies in order to raise awareness of and reduce teenage pregnancies as well as to prevent, detect and treat breast and cervical cancer and to halt the spread of HIV among women.

24. Through the Thousand Women Programme, women in vulnerable situations were given access to professional education and jobs. Although a woman had been elected President of Brazil for the first time in 2012, women continued to be underrepresented in decision-making roles: they made up 52 per cent of all voters but only 10 per cent of parliamentarians. The President had made it a priority to improve the representation of women in high-level decision-making positions, including within the Government.

25. **Ms. Hewanpola** (Australia) said that the shooting of Malala Youssafzai, who had been targeted because she advocated for girls' rights to education, was a reminder of the enormous challenges that lay ahead in achieving gender equality. Fear was enough to keep girls at home, disempowered and unable to access opportunities.

26. The advancement of women was dependent on the elimination of all violence against them. Women's

health, educational opportunities, economic empowerment and political participation would only thrive in environments where their safety was guaranteed. Australia had launched a national plan to reduce violence against women that sought to raise awareness of violence in the community and address the needs of children exposed to domestic violence. A key element of Australia's development assistance was aimed at empowering women and it had recently launched a Pacific Gender Equality Initiative which it would implement in partnership with Pacific States.

27. Noting the disproportionate and different effect of violent conflict on women and girls and recognizing that violence against women and economic, political and social empowerment were interrelated, Australia strongly supported the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security. Australia had launched a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2018), which integrated a gender perspective into all peace initiatives and promoted the participation of women and girls in conflict prevention and resolution.

28. Trafficking in persons also disproportionately affected women and girls; as part of its Anti-People Trafficking Strategy, Australia was strengthening legislation to ensure that the broadest range of exploitative behaviour was criminalized. Australia was active in international and regional efforts to combat trafficking and was proud to co-chair the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime.

29. Australia was strongly supportive of the United Nations' commitment and focus on gender issues and urged States to support regular briefings by the UN-Women Executive Director and the Special Rapporteurs, including to the Security Council, on gender equality and efforts to reduce violence against women.

30. **Ms. Abdul Rahim** (Malaysia) said that Malaysia had long acknowledged the role women played in driving forward social, political and economic development. In 1989 it had set up a national policy on women and, on acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1997, it had established a National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women. Gender perspectives had been mainstreamed into the development process, laws affecting women had been

reviewed, access to education had been improved, training had been enhanced and health care upgraded. A significant number of qualified women had been appointed to important positions following the introduction of a policy which ensured that at least 30 per cent of women participated in decision-making at all levels in the public sector. The further empowerment of women was a key component of Malaysia's current five-year plan, which included efforts to improve female participation in the workforce and to support widows, single mothers and women with lower incomes. It was estimated that some 4,000 women would be trained in entrepreneurial skills through a programme that had been founded in 2009 as part of the Government's drive to prioritize women's development.

31. Mindful that many women lived in rural areas, the Government had set up income-generating programmes for rural and indigenous women, providing training on agricultural best practices to enhance skills and knowledge. In the long run, crop yields from small plantations would contribute to food sustainability and raising family incomes.

32. Malaysia shared experiences and best practices with other developing countries and continued to fund and support the Non-Aligned Movement Institute for the Empowerment of Women.

33. **Ms. Vervoord** (Netherlands), noting that she was speaking on the International Day of Rural Women, wished to highlight the impact women could have on banishing poverty and hunger. Women made up nearly half of the agricultural workforce and they could help to alleviate hunger if they were given access to the same resources as men. Research had shown that GDP growth driven by agriculture was twice as effective as other sectors in reducing poverty. Giving women land ownership rights, practical advice and information would enable them to contribute to agricultural productivity.

34. It had been a source of great disappointment that the Commission on the Status of Women had failed to adopt agreed conclusions at its fifty-sixth session. The international community should work together to address issues that were especially prevalent in rural areas: honour killings, child marriages and denial of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. In the interests of achieving global peace and security she called on Governments, the private sector and civil

society to pay attention to women's voices and to encourage them to participate and to fulfill their potential.

35. **Ms. Dagher** (Lebanon) said that her delegation welcomed the international and regional efforts made to increase awareness of violence against women and ensure women's effective participation in society. Yet, notwithstanding the progress realized in those areas, international statistics showed that such violence was still a worldwide phenomenon that affected women regardless of income level, class or education, a situation which called for intensified efforts and international cooperation.

36. In Lebanon, in the context of a Constitution under which all persons were equal before the law without any discrimination, cooperation was ongoing between the National Authority for Women's Affairs created by the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Social Affairs and civil society organizations. A project to provide services for women who had suffered domestic violence at Ministry of Social Affairs centres had been carried out. Free psychological and legal counseling and support for such women were also provided in cooperation with experts and specialists from non-governmental associations (NGOs). Projects on economic and social empowerment of women victims of violence had been implemented. A technical task force had been created to develop specialized procedures for the investigation of cases of violence by medical professionals, draft a code of conduct for medical workers and standardize counseling services. Consciousness-raising and training programmes and information campaigns to combat all forms of violence against women had been carried out, with the participation of men, in cooperation with NGOs.

37. After two years of debate involving the effective participation of women's organizations and civil-society institutions, a draft law on combating domestic violence had been prepared and submitted to Parliament for approval.

38. The advancement of women and eliminating all forms of violence against them were a national responsibility, but also a regional and international one, which began with education concerning rights and duties, the creation of educational and legal frameworks and providing protection and resources to enable women to play their role as full-fledged citizens and partners.

39. Her delegation commended UN-Women on its activities, but hoped to see greater cooperation with the competent United Nations agencies.

40. **Ms. Maina** (Nigeria) said that Nigeria had been consistent in its commitment to the empowerment of women and gender equality. The Government was in the process of incorporating the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa into a gender and equal opportunities bill and the National Assembly was considering including provisions of the Convention in the Constitution.

41. In Nigeria, 33 per cent of executive decision-making positions and 50 per cent of positions in the judiciary were occupied by women; they were also well-represented in ministerial ranks and in the higher echelons of the civil service. Efforts to increase women's participation in the National Assembly would continue. A national programme designed to curb youth unemployment and increase entrepreneurial activities launched in September 2012 had targeted women between the ages of 18 and 45.

42. Economic growth, sustained human development and poverty eradication required democratic participation and changes in economic structures in order to ensure that women had access to resources, credits and public services. The Government was offering those opportunities through its Subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment Programme, since investing in women and girls had a multiplier effect on the family unit, productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth.

43. The Government also encouraged women to participate in civic responsibility programmes, a strategy that was aimed at overcoming stereotypes, mindsets and harmful traditional practices that affected women's health. Education, malnutrition, limited access to health services, early marriage, female genital mutilation and other forms of violence against women and poverty remained the main social risk factors. The Government was seeking to enhance reproductive health rights and pledged to intensify its efforts to mainstream gender issues.

44. **Ms. Morch Smith** (Norway), recalling that Malala Youssafzai had been shot for advocating every girl's right to education, said that women and girls

across the world were still being denied the most basic rights and they risked their lives in standing up for them. Most violence against women took place in the home and was inflicted by close family members and, consequently, was seen by many as a private matter. Yet violence was a crime and should be treated as such.

45. The root of the problem was gender inequality: research had shown that there was a connection between the level of gender inequality in a family and the level of violence. Women must be empowered in order to end that destructive pattern and men and boys must be part of the solution. Ending violence and promoting equality was a moral imperative since both men and women had the right to a life free from violence.

46. Violence was also a contributing factor to poverty and lack of development; gender equality was therefore crucial for sustainable development. In order to reduce poverty, all women, irrespective of race, sexual orientation or whether they had a disability, must be empowered to make use of their full potential.

47. Sexual and reproductive rights of women and young people were also central to sustainable development. Millions of women, especially poor, rural women, did not have freedom to control their own reproductive lives and health and had limited access to basic reproductive health services. As a result, many died each year from pregnancy-related causes, including many girls who had married and become pregnant far too early. Early marriage and childbearing involved health risks and were impediments to education and employment and to economic and political freedom.

48. Human rights defenders who stood up for women's rights faced violence and abuse. Gender-related killings were on the rise and continued to be tolerated and justified. States had a responsibility to prevent those crimes and to prosecute the perpetrators. The forthcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which would focus on violence against women, would be an opportunity for Member States to join forces and demonstrate their commitment to guarantee women's fundamental rights and freedoms.

49. **Ms. Ahmed Hassan** (Djibouti) said that the Constitution of her country guaranteed equality between women and men. The Government was conscious that sustainable development policies would

not produce tangible results unless women were included in development processes and decision-making.

50. Djibouti had placed gender equity and equality at the heart of Government action for over a decade, since its adoption of a national strategy on the integration of women in development. The minimum legal age for marriage was 18 years and a quota system ensured that between 10 and 20 percent of senior government positions were reserved for women. A National Gender Policy 2012-2022 had been developed with the aim of achieving structural and behavioural change. Women made up 14 per cent of representation in Parliament, participated in local elections and served in regional and municipal councils.

51. Education of women and girls played a vital role in the promotion of women's rights and in achieving the MDGs. Djibouti had made significant progress in girls' education at all levels since 2000 and there was almost no difference between the attendance rate of girls and boys at primary school, although discrimination persisted in rural and poor areas. Girls' education had been promoted through a national school registration day as well as through grants and supplies to families whose daughters attended school.

52. Concerning violence, the Government conducted information and awareness campaigns to inform women of the laws protecting them. It had also published a guide to the law and made available legal aid to assist with the costs that often prevented women from seeking justice. Female genital mutilation was the most widespread form of violence against women in Djibouti. The Government had succeeded in reducing the prevalence rate to some 5 per cent through an education campaign in partnership with UNICEF and UNFPA and by making the practice a crime. Nevertheless, much work remained to be done.

53. **Mr. Shin** Dong-Ik (Republic of Korea) said that landmarks in the process of international standard-setting in women's human rights included the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the inclusion of gender equality as a Millennium Development Goal. In addition, there was a growing awareness and recognition of women's rights as indivisible from human rights and as a prerequisite for sustainable development. Yet women still accounted for the majority of the world's poor and were

disproportionately affected by violence and discrimination.

54. No discussion of gender equality would be complete without reference to the elimination of violence against women: throughout the world, women and girls suffered from domestic and sexual violence, human trafficking, forced marriage, genital mutilation and other forms of abuse. Furthermore, perpetrators had been protected by a widespread culture of impunity. An effective response to violence would require a comprehensive approach that encompassed not only prosecution of offenders but also prevention measures, including awareness-raising, and remedies for victims. Sexual violence in times of war was one of the most shocking human rights violations; its gravity was recognized in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court where it was codified as a war crime and a crime against humanity. Such crimes continued to be of concern to the international community, including the suffering of the so-called "comfort women" forced into sexual military slavery in the Second World War which had still to be addressed. The true strength of a nation could be demonstrated when it had the courage to face the darkest chapters in its history and to accept responsibility. It was crucial that each State should promote human rights education on the issue of wartime sexual violence and ensure accurate accounts of events in educational curriculums in order to prevent the recurrence of such violations.

55. **Ms. Diaz Gras** (Mexico) said that, in light of the statistic that up to seven in every ten women suffered physical or sexual violence, that issue must receive the full commitment of Member States. The Commission on the Status of Women should focus on the theme of elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls at its next session; she hoped that, unlike in its deliberations on rural women, it would not fail to adopt agreed conclusions. Turning to the plight of indigenous and migrant women, she recalled that Mexico had been one of the sponsors of the draft resolution on indigenous women. The resolution reflected the concern that indigenous women suffered from multiple forms of poverty and discrimination. Migrant women, too, should not be forgotten in efforts to eliminate violence, discrimination and maternal mortality: Mexico remained committed to all of the agreements to which it was party concerning them.

56. While recognizing the progress made since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all



Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the excellent leadership of UN-Women, she believed that the challenge would be to incorporate gender equity in all tasks of the United Nations, in particular in the sustainable development agenda.

57. **Mr. Rakovskiy** (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federation was not convinced that convening an international conference would be the best manner in which to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action since it could be seen as an opportunity to revise the outcomes of the Beijing Conference. The issue must be discussed at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women; furthermore, no attempt should be made to discredit or take over the work of the Commission. It was regrettable that the Commission had not been able to reach agreed conclusions on the situation of rural women at its fifty-sixth session because some delegations had sought to impose their own views concerning women's status. He hoped that such a situation would be avoided in future and cautioned against imposing on the Commission decisions that had not been taken by Governments. Similarly, while resolution 64/289 (2010) outlined the universal coverage of UN-Women, its presence within a country relied on the permission of the Government concerned.

58. The Russian Federation had developed programmes to achieve work/life balance, provided social protection for expectant mothers and encouraged women to participate in all spheres of society. Women held 36 per cent of agricultural jobs, they had been appointed to some of the highest posts in Government and they were prominent in local administration and civil society. His Government recognized that gender equality also meant economic independence for women and therefore supported the ILO Global Jobs Pact, which sought to ensure decent work for both women and men.

59. **Mr. Kyaw Thu Nyein** (Myanmar) said that women in Myanmar had traditionally enjoyed a high degree of equal rights, and their rights were protected by tradition, the Constitution and existing laws. Since its accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Government had implemented a series of national plans for the advancement of women.

60. Initiatives to promote women's rights included the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs and the Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation, an NGO. In line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women 2012-2021 had been put in place.

61. Women's participation in the political process and governance had increased in recent years: a number of women had been appointed to the position of cabinet minister and deputy minister and many Government departments were headed by female directors-general.

62. Girls occupied an important place in Myanmar society as the custodians of family wealth and tradition; special emphasis was therefore given to their advancement. His delegation welcomed the message of the Secretary-General on the International Day of the Girl Child that investing in girls was a moral imperative.

63. **Ms. Abubakar** (Libya) said that her country was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol and was fully committed to implementing its provisions domestically. Libyan law guaranteed women's enjoyment of all fundamental rights, including the right to health and education services, social security and retirement pensions; the right of ownership; and the right to carry on economic activities, participate in the political process, engage in social work and establish civil society organizations, without discrimination.

64. Libyan women were striving to participate actively in the advancement of the community both economically and socially. They had taken part in the 17 February revolution against the Qadhafi dictatorship and were currently participating in the rebuilding of the country at the political decision-making level. Indeed, 33 of the 200 seats in the General National Congress were held by women. The strong participation of Libyan women both in election campaigns and at the polls in the first elections to take place in Libya for more than five decades had marked a turning point in the life of the country's women.

65. Her delegation welcomed the activities carried out by UN-Women under its strategic plan, 2011-2013, the emphasis on gender mainstreaming throughout the Organization and the increasing focus on marginalized women and on education, which was the basis of the

empowerment of women. It hoped to see greater representation of women in United Nations leadership positions.

66. Her Government condemned all forms of violence against women, which affected women of all social strata, races, beliefs and religions. It rejected any link between violence, in particular domestic violence, and religion. It strongly condemned trafficking in women, a crime that was on the rise owing to impunity and lack of reporting, and supported the Secretary-General's recommendation concerning the criminalization of such activities in accordance with the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols.

67. Her delegation reiterated its concern about the flagrant violations of the rights of Palestinian women in the occupied territory and the discriminatory and degrading practices to which they were subject at the hands of the Israeli occupying forces. The international community must honour its commitments to protect those rights.

68. **Ms. Velichko** (Belarus) said that gender equality and empowerment of women were essential for the successful development of society. Her Government commended the role of UN-Women as a catalyst in advancing women's rights and looked forward to its future work in Belarus.

69. Belarus placed priority on gender issues and had already attained MDG 3. The country's gender equality plan focused on equal participation of men and women in all spheres of life; it also included awareness-raising through national campaigns and highlighting the role of women politicians. The Labour Code protected women in the workplace and the Government provided training and encouraged self-employment and entrepreneurship.

70. The Government was concerned by the persistent level of violence against women and was grateful for the assistance provided by UNFPA in combating it. Social protection was provided to women who were victims of violence and other crimes. Belarus strongly supported the view that gender equality and women's advancement should feature prominently in the post-2015 development agenda.

71. **Ms. Al Jassmi** (United Arab Emirates) said that her country looked forward to joining the UN-Women Executive Board in 2013. It reaffirmed the importance

of empowerment of women through education and training in the fields of public affairs, public policy, economics, information technology and science to provide them with the requisite knowledge and skills for full and effective participation in society.

72. Her country was proud of its achievements in the area of advancement and empowerment of women within the framework of the implementation of the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

73. Her Government had succeeded in eliminating poverty through a number of policies aimed at raising the income of citizens, in particular women. It guaranteed free education up to and including the university level for all citizens. Primary-school enrolment had reached 95 per cent for girls. The country had the highest percentage of females with advanced degrees, and aimed to abolish the gender difference in education at all levels by 2015.

74. Economic and social developments in the country and the efforts of the State had resulted in improved health for citizens, including women. Infant mortality had dropped to 7.5 per 1000 and life expectancy had risen to 78 years for women and 75 years for men. Maternal mortality was 0.01 per 100,000 live births.

75. In the area of economic empowerment, the State had encouraged women to enter the labour market in the public and private sectors, with no restrictions as to type of employment. Women made up 43 per cent of the labour force and held 66 per cent of government sector posts, 30 per cent of which were leadership posts, and businesswomen managed investment projects valued at over 5.12 billion dirhams.

76. With regard to political empowerment, women held a number of leadership and decision-making posts, including four ministerial portfolios, and occupied 18 per cent of the seats in the Federal National Council. There were three women Ambassadors and 139 women diplomats and a number of judges of first instance and deputy prosecutors. Women had also joined the armed forces and the police.

77. The Constitution guaranteed equality between men and women and a number of institutional mechanisms had been established to implement international instruments on women. The Government

had reviewed the laws and regulations pertaining to women and taken other action to promote equality between the sexes, enforce women's human rights and strengthen the capacities of women's organizations. In 2006 the Ministry of Social Affairs had been established to handle social policy and focus on women's and children's issues.

78. Her Government had adopted legal, security and international cooperation measures to prevent violence of all kinds against women and children, with a special focus on combating trafficking in human beings.

79. **Mr. de Leon** (Cuba) said that, despite progress made since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the feminization of poverty remained a great concern. Developing countries continued to encounter obstacles in complying with the Beijing Platform for Action and in achieving the MDGs, most notably due to the decline in official development assistance, rising external debt, climate change and the economic, food and energy crises. Gender equity and the empowerment of women could not be realized without sustainable development and a just and democratic international order.

80. Similarly, the elimination of violence against women also required the elimination of all forms of unilateral coercion. The economic and commercial blockade by the United States of America was the biggest impediment to the development of women and children in Cuba.

81. Cuba had worked very hard for gender equality and the empowerment of women long before the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDGs. Its efforts were demonstrated in the life expectancy of women in Cuba, which stood at 80 years; women also made up 67 per cent of university graduates, 70 per cent of workers in health and education and 56 per cent of the judiciary. Cuban women held 70 per cent of government posts and made up some 43 per cent of parliamentarians. Cuba would continue to strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women at all levels of society.

82. **Mr. El Mkhantar** (Morocco) said that the importance his country attached to the advancement of women was reflected in the legislative and institutional measures it had taken in that area. Much remained to be done; the effectiveness of action taken by the international community would depend on the quality of the partnerships formed between Governments and

civil society in order to change attitudes and behaviours.

83. Women had a vital role to play in peacebuilding and national reconstruction; it was therefore crucial to include them in rebuilding relationships in post-conflict societies. At the same time, women and girls were particularly vulnerable and required protection in situations of conflict. The Government had put in place a national plan for the period 2012-2016 that dealt with equal access for women to education and health services, management and decision-making roles and the labour market. It also covered the empowerment of rural women.

84. The Government had recently drafted an amendment to the Penal Code that increased the penalties for the perpetrators of all forms of violence against women, as well as providing protection to victims and witnesses. In addition, women victims of violence who were to appear in court were provided with support from social workers. A telephone helpline had been set up for victims and judges had been specially trained in dealing with such cases. A solidarity fund had been set up in 2010 in order to provide direct assistance to widows and divorced women in vulnerable situations.

85. The newly-amended Constitution of Morocco guaranteed the human rights and freedoms of men and women and provided for the establishment of a body that would ensure equality and combat all forms of discrimination. Reforms introduced by the Ministry of Finance would evaluate the costs of including gender in all budgets.

86. **Ms. Taalas** (Finland) said that ensuring women's full and effective participation in society was one of the bedrocks of Finland's human rights policy. Despite the progress made in gender equality, violence against women remained a serious challenge. It was especially important to promote the human rights of women who suffered abuse and to provide support to the human rights defenders against whom the threat or use of violence was often directed.

87. Finland's national five-year action plan on violence against women sought to influence attitudes and behaviour related to gender-based violence. In 2011, Finland had become a signatory to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and planned to host a sub-regional seminar aimed at

promoting ratification in 2013. Finland also strongly supported UN-Women and would increase its core funding to that entity in 2013.

88. Increased efforts were needed to improve women's access to justice and to resources and influence in politics, public services and the economy. In that context, she welcomed the Declaration at the recent High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the rule of law which reaffirmed the equal rights of men and women, including vulnerable groups. It had been encouraging that a number of Member States had made voluntary pledges.

89. Another issue related to women's empowerment was the right to sexual and reproductive health: women and girls required access to good quality and comprehensive reproductive health information, education and care. Ensuring that young people were able to make informed and responsible decisions regarding whether and when to have children had important implications for their health, well-being and human rights as well as for future demographics. Commitment to sexual and reproductive health rights was therefore a valuable investment in human rights, the status of women and sustainable development.

90. **Ms. Zaslansky** (Israel) said that gender equality had been enshrined in Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948 and a law concerning equal rights for women had been passed in 1951. Israel had been the third country in the world to be led by a female prime minister, Golda Meir, and women continued to hold leadership positions in the country in government, business, the law and academia.

91. More recently, numerous frameworks for mainstreaming gender had been established under the leadership of the Israeli Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women. Legislation included the Law on Gender Implications in Legislation, which mandated that all bills must be reviewed from a gender perspective before they were adopted.

92. Israel was honoured to serve as a member of the Commission on the Status of Women. It also strongly supported the landmark Security Council resolution on women, peace and security and welcomed the deployment of gender advisers and the routine inclusion in peacekeeping mandates of provisions to protect women and girls from sexual violence. Israel supported the work of UN-Women in promoting gender

mainstreaming and welcomed its growing presence in the field.

93. Non-governmental organizations were a critical pillar for global efforts to empower women and States should expand partnerships and share best practices with them. Israel had a vibrant civil society that was dedicated to improving the status of women, regardless of political affiliation, religious outlook or ethnic origin.

94. Education played an essential role in changing attitudes and ensuring that the young women of tomorrow could live in a society free of prejudice and discrimination. MASHAV, Israel's International Agency for Development Cooperation, conducted numerous training programmes for women: since 1961, its training centre had trained over 17,500 women from over 100 different countries in community development, early childhood education, and organization and management of micro-enterprises.

95. Her country recognized the integral link between empowering women and ending violence against them. Women who were educated and economically independent were better equipped to fight gender-based violence and discrimination. Israel supported the Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign and was a donor to the Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.

96. There was still much work to be done to achieve the MDGs related to gender equality: serious attention must be given to addressing the issues of early and forced marriage, harmful traditional practices, female genital mutilation, honour killings and human trafficking. Women must also have access to health services and to information related to their sexual and reproductive rights. The empowerment of women and girls should be made a central pillar of the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

97. **Ms. Solórzano** (Nicaragua) said that Nicaraguan women had benefited from initiatives introduced as a result of the Government's National Human Development Plan, which had targeted illiteracy and provided free health and education services and an expanded social security system. The reforms had been a determining factor in ensuring women's integration in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the country. As far as the MDG Indicators were concerned, gains had been made in the macroeconomic sphere, in

generating employment and in reducing extreme poverty.

98. Through the Government's food security and food production programmes, rights had been restored to many rural women. An Act on equal opportunities guaranteed equality between women and men and stipulated that women should have access to property and power. Despite the global recession, Nicaragua had maintained its social services and continued with reforms to improve equity as a result of its public policies, the mobilization of the people and the solidarity of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). Government policies had provided free family and community health care and various measures to protect women from violence, including the creation of women's police stations and legislation that affirmed the rights of women who were subjected to violence. One of the goals enshrined in the Equal Opportunity Act was to achieve 50 per cent representation of women in public life. In forthcoming municipal elections, 50 per cent of the candidates applying for the position of mayor and deputy mayor would be women. Women made up some 42 per cent of those elected to the current session of the National Assembly, a great improvement on the figures in 2007-2011.

99. Economic empowerment of women was an essential component of gender equality; accordingly, the Government had introduced benefits such as "Zero Hunger", the "Food Production Bonus" and "Zero Usury" low-interest loans. Granting land ownership rights to rural women and property rights to female heads of households had enabled them to seek credit, ending the myth that it was only possible for men to do so. Furthermore, an Act established a fund that would enable rural women to buy land. The Government of Nicaragua would continue to work towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, since they were essential components of economic and social development.

100. **Mr. Kodama** (Japan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply in response to the statement by the representative of the Republic of Korea on "comfort women", said that the Government of Japan recognized that the issue had been a grave affront to the honour and dignity of a large number of women. It had expressed its sincere apologies and remorse to all those known as "comfort women" who had suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and

psychological wounds. The question of reparations, property and claims concerning the Second World War had been legally settled with the countries that were parties to the San Francisco Peace Treaty and through bilateral treaties, agreements and instruments. In addition, in 1995, the Government and people of Japan had established the Asian Women's Fund to facilitate support for the former "comfort women" who had by then reached an advanced age. The Government of Japan had extended its maximum support to the Fund, including health and welfare assistance as well as the provision of atonement money, and it would continue its utmost efforts to widen further recognition of the earnest feelings of the people of Japan as reflected through the activities of the Fund. It would continue to follow up on those activities.

101. **Mr. Shin Dong-ik** (Republic of Korea), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his delegation was deeply concerned that Japan continued to deny its legal responsibility towards military sexual slavery victims, ignoring the tremendous pain and suffering inflicted on them and the repeated calls of the international community to address the matter in a sincere manner. The issue of "comfort women" constituted war crimes under international humanitarian law and, under defined circumstances, might constitute crimes against humanity. The issue had never been addressed in the course of negotiating the 1965 *Agreement on the settlement of problems concerning property and claims and economic co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea* and it had not been settled within the terms of that agreement. Therefore the legal responsibility of the Japanese Government remained effective. In addition, both the 1996 report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (E/CN.4/1996/53/Add.1) and the 1998 report of the Special Rapporteur on systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/13) confirmed that neither the San Francisco Peace Treaty nor any of the bilateral treaties concluded thereafter were concerned with human rights violations in general or military sexual slavery in particular. They had recommended that the Government of Japan should accept its legal responsibility and pay compensation to the victims. Other recommendations had been made by many human rights treaty bodies on the issue of so-called "comfort women": the recommendation of the Committee against Torture in 2007 and the

recommendations of the Human Rights Committee in 2008, as well as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2009, reaffirmed that the issue of “comfort women” remained unresolved. His delegation called on the Government of Japan to recognize its legal responsibility and take appropriate measures acceptable to the victims as recommended by the international community. He also urged the Japanese Government to work towards the historical truth of the issue in a thorough manner so that it could provide future generations with lessons to help prevent the reoccurrence of similar tragic and inhumane acts that violated fundamental human rights.

*The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.*