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Chair: Mr. Tafrov (Chair) (Bulgaria)

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

Agenda item 28: Advancement of women (continued)
(A/68/121)

(a) **Advancement of women (continued)** (A/68/38, A/68/178, A/68/179, A/68/184 and A/68/340)

(b) **Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (continued)** (A/68/175)

1. **Ms. Strachwitz** (Liechtenstein) urged all States and relevant entities to implement the commitments contained in the agreed conclusions on violence against women adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-seventh session. Liechtenstein had endorsed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict and welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 2106 (2013); both initiatives sent a clear message that sexual violence was unacceptable and that efforts to combat it must be redoubled.

2. The continuing culture of impunity posed a major challenge in the area of violence against women and sexual violence. States must raise awareness, build trust in their national judicial systems and ensure that those who violated women's rights were held accountable. Furthermore, officials must be trained to provide victims with support and make sure that they received protection and redress. She noted that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court had recognized sexual violence as a war crime and a crime against humanity, and that 18 individuals were currently being charged with sexual crimes by the Court.

3. As women continued to be excluded from decision-making, their rights and needs were often neglected in peace accords and institutional arrangements. States must therefore do more to protect the rights of women to participate on equal terms and at all levels, particularly in times of political transition. Her delegation hoped that the Security Council would duly emphasize the importance of women's equal participation in transitional justice at its open debate on the subject in October 2013. The United Nations must lead by example and appoint more women as leaders in mediation and other transitional processes.

4. Despite repeated commitments and advances in the legal framework to strengthen women's rights, violence against women continued to prevail; it was particularly worrying that the standards contained in the Beijing Platform for Action were still considered negotiable. Liechtenstein strongly supported the inclusion of a stand-alone gender goal and the mainstreaming of gender issues throughout the post-2015 development agenda.

5. **Mr. Rakovskiy** (Russian Federation), reaffirming his Government's support for the Commission on the Status of Women as the main intergovernmental forum for constructive dialogue among all regional groups of States on gender-related issues, said that any attempts to discredit the Commission and to allow its powers and functions to be taken over by other bodies were inadmissible. With the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action approaching, his delegation trusted that, as in the past, the substantive work of reviewing the implementation of the decisions of the fourth World Conference would be carried out in the regional commissions, and the review at the international level would be conducted by the Commission's at its fifty-ninth session in 2015.

6. Coherence must be maintained between the overall policy direction and standard setting performed by the Commission on the Status of Women and the operational strategies defined by the executive board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). He called on UN-Women to work with not only developing but also developed countries, since its mandate covered all groups of States without exception. Its presence on the ground was acceptable only at the request and with the consent of the concerned States. The activities of UN-Women must be coordinated with the work of other United Nations programmes and with United Nations bodies already present in individual countries.

7. Given the integral role of women's economic equality and independence in achieving gender equality, the Russian Federation was striving to ensure that women had equal access to education and employment in order to achieve their potential and maintain work-life balance. His Government supported the view of the International Labour Organization that gender equality had a central part to play in achieving full employment and decent work for all.

8. **Ms. Loew** (Switzerland) said that efforts to combat violence against women and girls needed to be strengthened, in terms of prevention, protection and response; it was important to address the root causes of the problem. To that end, her Government had recently signed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Switzerland welcomed ongoing efforts to end early and forced marriage — a serious human rights violation and a harmful traditional practice. Traditional values should be reviewed in light of their impact on the perpetuation of gender inequality.

9. Out of a conviction that all women and girls had the right to control their own bodies and to be free from coercion and sexual violence, her delegation was committed to promoting women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Noting the high rate of impunity among perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict, post-conflict and disaster situations, Switzerland called upon States to fulfil their obligation to investigate, prosecute and punish crimes against women and girls.

10. Empowerment of women and girls was a prerequisite and a major driving force for sustainable development and economic growth. In the hope that the ongoing discussion of the post-2015 development agenda would address gender disparities worldwide, Switzerland was in favour of a stand-alone goal on gender equality and of addressing gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in all other goals. Women must also be given access to non-income-related social protection that would value the massive amount of time they invested in non-paid care work. Her delegation urged those States that had yet done so to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol.

11. **Ms. Martínez** (Mexico) said that it was important to make gender a cross-cutting issue in the post-2015 development agenda and to place particular emphasis on the situation of women and girls. Mexico welcomed the adoption by the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-seventh session of the first United Nations document to explicitly mention gender-based violence. A gender perspective must be incorporated systematically, particularly in areas where little progress was being made, such as conflict situations. Her Government also accorded priority to

issues of international migration and human trafficking.

12. Her Government had included gender as a cross-cutting element in its national development plan; its strategy involved eliminating gender stereotypes and implementing inclusive public policies, including affirmative action for women. The national institute for women was working to promote women's economic participation, with particular emphasis on indigenous women, and 30 of the 32 Mexican states had gender equality and anti-violence laws. Federal and local authorities were in the process of including the crime of femicide in their criminal codes. Moreover, the Supreme Court had introduced a training protocol for judges on gender equality and non-discrimination on the basis of gender. Despite the steps already taken, Mexico still faced great challenges in promoting and protecting the rights of women and children. Her Government would therefore redouble its efforts to honour its commitment to combat gender-based violence, discrimination against women and gender inequality.

13. **Mr. Chu Guang** (China) said that the observance of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provided an opportunity to strengthen the political will to tackle various challenges faced by women. China was in favour of giving full consideration to gender in the post-2015 development agenda. Governments must energetically promote women's participation in development as a means of both ensuring women's survival and advancement and facilitating global economic recovery. They should take integrated measures to eliminate employment discrimination, enhance job training, support women entrepreneurs and protect the rights and interests of women workers. Greater attention must be paid to rural women, who were the driving force of agricultural and rural development, but were at a disadvantage compared to rural men and urban women in terms of access to resources and opportunities for development and to the benefits of development. With the accelerated industrialization and urbanization of developing countries, the feminization of agricultural activities was proceeding apace, hence the pressing need to attend to the empowerment of rural women. Lastly, effective measures must be taken to eliminate violence against women. All countries should work more

diligently to protect the rights and interests of women migrants and safeguard their dignity.

14. His Government's achievements in the area of women's empowerment and development included the adoption of legislation against domestic violence and the allocation of over RMB 100 billion in microloans and over RMB 4 billion in discount loans to women, helping millions of women start their own businesses or find employment. Equal participation of women in socioeconomic affairs was instrumental to achieving the centennial goals set by the new collective leadership of China, namely, to build a moderately prosperous society by 2020 and to turn China into a modern socialist country by the middle of the century. Chinese women's attainment of those goals, in turn, would certainly advance the cause of women globally.

15. **Mr. Cortorreal** (Dominican Republic) said that the Dominican Republic had a legal framework that incorporated relevant advances in the fight against gender-based violence, including the 2010 Constitution, which prohibited all forms of domestic and gender-based violence. Measures aimed at strengthening gender equality and eliminating violence against women included the enactment of a series of laws against domestic violence and the adoption of several national plans on violence against women and of national standards for comprehensive health care for victims. Other services provided to victims included shelters, counseling, legal and psychological support and a 24-hour emergency hotline.

16. Despite the progress made, violence against women persisted in his country. The integration of national mechanisms and support networks to combat violence against women needed to be strengthened and provided with dedicated funding. The Ministry of Labour needed to define the equitable sharing of responsibilities, including family responsibilities, between women and men. The main challenge was to ensure that gender equality and the prevention of violence were incorporated into national education, in order to create a new system of values whereby gender equality was put into practice by women and men.

17. His Government had committed to a five-year contribution toward the core budget of UN-Women and would be hosting the Global Training Centre as well as a national office. The Dominican Republic would also host the twelfth Regional Conference on Women in

Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held in October 2013.

18. **Ms. Bar-Sadeh** (Israel) said that her Government's law on gender implications in legislation mandated that all bills were reviewed from a gender perspective before being passed. Israel supported the call by UN-Women for a stand-alone gender equality goal in the post-2015 development agenda.

19. Although women performed two-thirds of the world's work and produced half of the food, their stake in global income, property ownership and leadership was unaccountably low, and their exposure to violence unacceptably high. The use of sexual violence as a weapon in war was particularly abhorrent, as was the routine nature of human rights violations against women and girls in many parts of the world. A strong supporter of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and the Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign, Israel was a donor country of the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.

20. Aware that educating girls was an investment in a society free of prejudice and discrimination, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation ran a number of education programmes for women, including the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre, one of the world's oldest women's development training centres. When women generated their own income, they reinvested 90 per cent of it in their families and communities. Moreover, women's education resulted in lower child mortality rates and higher enrolment rates. Above all, investing in girls and women was a matter of basic human rights.

21. Gender equality was enshrined in Israel's 1948 declaration of independence and had been implemented through law and public policy. Her country had been the third in the world to elect a woman to its highest office. In a region where women were all too often excluded from public life, Israeli women stood out as leaders in all areas and at all levels of society. Given the critical contribution of women and girls to social, economic and political progress and to sustainable peace, they must be empowered to become full partners in society with equal rights and opportunities.

22. **Ms. Hosking** (South Africa) said that the uneven progress achieved on the Millennium Development Goals on gender equality, the empowerment of women and maternal mortality gave cause for concern; the

human rights of women and gender empowerment must be mainstreamed and central to the future development agenda. The establishment of UN-Women had provided an impetus for the integration of gender perspectives throughout the United Nations system, which had shown renewed commitment to addressing the terrible scourge of sexual violence as well as the challenges associated with women's participation in political, electoral, peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes in conflict and post-conflict settings.

23. In line with South Africa's Constitution, her Government had established a progressive legislative framework to protect and advance the human rights of women. Women accounted for about 44 per cent of parliamentarians and cabinet ministers, and five of the nine provincial premiers. South Africa ranked fifth in the world for the proportion of women among corporate board members. Gender equality and the advancement of women's human rights was a central aspect of Government policy. The gender equality bill, which would become law in 2013, would require all organizations, entities and companies to achieve gender parity at leadership and decision-making levels. However, much more needed to be done, as women in South Africa, especially from previously disadvantaged groups, still bore a disproportionate burden of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Rural women were particularly vulnerable in that regard. A comprehensive rural development strategy was designed to empower rural women and provide access to economic opportunity and resources by ensuring that women, including those with disabilities, were the main beneficiaries of land reform. In addition, gender-responsive budgeting had been incorporated at all levels of Government budgeting planning processes.

24. As in other countries with large traditional and rural communities, South African women were often financially dependent on male relatives and vulnerable to the dangers of gender-based violence. Her Government was therefore stepping up the fight against such violence through the national council against gender-based violence, launched in August 2012, special courts for sexual offences to be established by the Ministry of Justice, and the relevant legislation already in place.

25. **Mr. Ruiz** (Colombia) said that the gender perspective should be incorporated in resolutions and agenda items on issues that were not specific to women and disaggregated data should be produced. He

expressed concern about the slow progress towards women's equal participation in political and other decision-making. It was gratifying, however, that the Latin American and Caribbean region was in second place in indicators of the number of women holding elected and appointed posts.

26. In Colombia, the threshold of 30 per cent of women in decision-making positions had been surpassed, and women accounted for at least one third of high-level positions in Government and the judiciary. There had been a slight decrease in women's representation in the legislature, however, and in the executive branch, only a small percentage of governors and mayors were women. In March 2013, her Government had adopted a national policy on gender equality, as well as an integrated plan to guarantee women a life free of violence which, notably, addressed gender-based violence in armed conflict and sought to strengthen institutional capacities in the relevant sectors. A number of training and capacity-building initiatives had been organized to prevent violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations and promote a culture of prevention. Her Government had signed an agreement with departmental authorities for the inclusion of displaced women in development plans, with an emphasis on ensuring women's access to justice and to community networks protecting them from violence. Various sexual and reproductive health policies and programmes to benefit women and girls had been established. Along with initiatives in such areas as education and credit, her Government's efforts had begun to bear fruit, but much remained to be done to counter deep-rooted cultural stereotypes.

27. Her Government had established a strategy for women's participation in the ongoing peace process with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. Women had participated actively in all stages of the process, ensuring the inclusion of a gender perspective.

28. **Ms. Grignon** (Kenya) said that there was a need to ensure coherent inter-agency collaboration at Headquarters and at the field level in advancing gender equality and empowerment and helping countries to achieve those goals. Discrimination against women and girls continued to limit women's participation in decision-making and political positions globally. Kenya, however, had taken legislative and other measures to enforce the constitutional principle that

not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointed public bodies should be of the same gender. Consequently, in the 2013 general elections, an unprecedented number of women had sought and won elective positions and six of the 18 Government ministries were currently headed by women. To improve maternal health and reduce maternal and child mortality, pre- and post-natal health services were provided free of charge in all public health care facilities and labour laws allowed for paternity leave.

29. Notwithstanding the consensus on the theme of violence against women at the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women, a targeted plan and international support were needed to reduce the pervasive crime of gender-based violence, particularly in the home. To that end, Kenya had established a number of policies and programmes, covering such issues as sexual offences, trafficking in persons, the prohibition of female genital mutilation, rape and sexual violence. Addressing the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence had also been prioritized in development plans, and measures had been taken to improve access to justice, including through waivers of court fees for women instituting proceedings.

30. To address the dire situation of the rural poor, exacerbated as a result of declining development assistance to agriculture, her Government was disbursing essential capital to women to finance commercial activities and invest in business opportunities. Training in managerial skills was also being provided, as a result of which many women were becoming less dependent on other benefactors. Women in rural areas also benefited from technological advances, particularly in mobile phone money transfer and e-banking. As the Millennium Development Goals deadline drew near, it was important to develop strategies to continue to invest in the education of women and girls.

31. **Ms. Adhikari** (Nepal) said that women should not merely be passive beneficiaries of development, but should be active agents of change in all societies. Development goals could not be met without addressing the specific problems faced by women. Collective efforts were needed to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls. Furthermore, the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants, especially women and children, regardless of their migration status, must be

effectively promoted and protected. There was also a need to respect international labour standards and the rights of migrants in their workplaces, both in origin and in destination countries.

32. The Interim Constitution of Nepal of 2007 guaranteed the fundamental rights of women and girls. Nepal had implemented significant domestic legislation for ensuring gender equality and prohibiting violence and discrimination against women, including acts on human trafficking and domestic violence. Women were entitled to inherit property and benefited from a quota system in education and employment. Increasing women's participation in decision-making, protecting them from sexual and gender-based violence and ending impunity for alleged crimes against women were priorities in relevant national plans of action. Nepal had adopted a zero tolerance policy on violence against women and established a special national fund for victims. In addition to the establishment of rehabilitation centres, one-stop crisis centres, medical, psychological and other counselling services and free legal aid, initiatives had been taken to establish fast track courts for domestic violence. There were also targeted programmes for rural women with a focus on economic, political and social empowerment and inclusion.

33. Institutionally, the rights of women were guaranteed and protected through the national human rights commission, the national women's commission and an independent judiciary. Sectoral Ministries were responsible for mainstreaming gender issues in their work and the annual budget was gender-responsive. Civil society, community-based organizations and the media also played a positive role in preventing violence and combating trafficking in women and girls. However, in order to eradicate gender-based violence, there was a need to address patriarchal attitudes, discriminatory intergenerational sociocultural practices, women's financial dependence and the limited available resources for implementing plans of action. Her Government was in need of strengthened cooperation and partnership on a predictable and sustainable basis.

34. **Ms. Solorzano** (Nicaragua) said that her Government considered women to be agents of change and development and since 2007 had instituted a gender policy establishing equality as a strategic prerequisite for representative democracy and a just, developed society. It had implemented a comprehensive

legislative framework comprising, inter alia, a law on equal rights and opportunities that recognized the inalienable human rights of men and women, a law on rural women's access to landownership and various labour laws to bridge the gender gap and prevent discrimination. Furthermore, recent reforms to the electoral laws had established gender parity in representation at municipal and national levels alike. Nicaragua ranked among the top countries in the world in terms of the participation of women in the executive, legislative and judicial branches and at the municipal level. Her Government had established a Ministry for Women to promote gender equality and women's autonomy.

35. In 2012, the national assembly had passed an act on violence against women, amending the criminal code. The law for the first time criminalized gender-based violence and focused on prevention, punishment and recovery. Other measures adopted recently included the establishment of special prosecutor's offices to protect the rights of women and of persons with different sexual orientations, and a programme for funding gender equality, an initiative of UN-Women, which would support the implementation of the national gender policy in cooperation with the relevant Ministries.

36. **Ms. Dagher** (Lebanon) said that equality of rights and obligations among all citizens without distinction was enshrined in her country's Constitution, which prohibited violence and discrimination against women and girls and promoted and protected their fundamental rights. While it was sometimes difficult to balance cultural and religious specificities with equal rights and obligations for all, that task was not impossible; it was important for women to be involved in the implementation of the legal framework for the full enjoyment of their rights. Her Government therefore worked closely with civil society and with regional and international organizations to promote the rights of women and girls and ensure equal opportunities and their full participation in national development.

37. Among the significant advances made was the adoption in July 2013 of a law to protect women and all family members from domestic violence and the establishment of support centres for victims. Furthermore, a standard labour contract to regulate the rights and obligations of migrant workers had been drafted and a joint project with the European Union

had been undertaken to promote women's participation in economic growth in rural areas. To ensure women's political participation, however, the right to vote was not enough — access to information, civic education and voter protection were needed. The statistics quoted in the Secretary-General's report (A/68/184) were misleading as they did not reflect the contribution of women in other sectors of the economy, such as the entrepreneurial sector, nor the cultural choice to be homemakers.

38. Her delegation hoped that the Committee would take up the question of the rights of women, including refugee and displaced women, in emergency situations and armed conflict, particularly in light of the current situation, with women and children accounting for more than 70 per cent of the 1 million Syrian refugees hosted in Lebanon. The promotion of the rights of women also needed to be included in the post-2015 development objectives; sustainable development could be achieved only through achievement of the equal and inalienable rights of all persons.

39. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Iceland) said that her country remained deeply concerned by the high number of reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and called upon those States which had made reservations incompatible with the purposes of the Convention to withdraw them immediately. It was unacceptable that women represented two-thirds of the world's illiterate population and continued to be in a great minority in parliamentary and government roles and were largely excluded from peace and disarmament processes, including United Nations sponsored peace talks. Women's active participation in all aspects of society could have a transformative impact on multiple issues, such as poverty reduction, crisis prevention and ending gender-based violence.

40. Iceland's national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), adopted as early as 2008, had recently been revised, taking into consideration lessons learned, experiences of other Member States and the Secretary General's recommendations. However, systematic progress on the goals of that resolution and subsequent resolutions was still greatly lacking, and much more needed to be done. The scourge of gender-based and sexual violence must end, as must impunity for the perpetrators of such crimes. Iceland fully supported the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in

Conflict Situations; it had spearheaded the inclusion in the Arms Trade Treaty of an article regarding the risk of conventional arms being used to facilitate gender-based violence.

41. Iceland's long history of contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment was illustrated by the Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme (GEST), initially a pilot collaboration project of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the University of Iceland in 2009, which had formally become a part of the United Nations University (UNU-GEST) in May 2013. The Programme was an important element of her country's official development assistance and aimed to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in developing countries and post-conflict societies through education and training. Those issues must be incorporated more effectively in all United Nations processes, particularly the processes that would culminate in 2015, and there must be zero tolerance for reneging on the commitments made. There would be no real progress in tackling current challenges, including climate change, food security and maternal and child mortality, without the participation of women; her delegation therefore firmly believed that it was necessary to have a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment and to ensure gender mainstreaming across the whole post-2015 development framework.

42. **Mr. Faye** (Senegal) said that women's participation in public life must begin with their right to vote and eligibility to stand for office in regular, democratic elections. However, women must also be involved in the formulation and application of public policies for there to be true gender equality and empowerment for women. Despite the recognition of women's untapped potential and the considerable efforts being made to strengthen legislative and structural frameworks in many countries, the international community was still far from the objective of gender parity in leadership positions.

43. In 2010, Senegal had adopted a law establishing full gender parity in all elected bodies at the local, regional and national levels. As a result of that landmark law, following the 2012 legislative elections, women's representation in Parliament had risen to over 44 per cent, or more than double the global average. Women currently held leadership posts in the Government, the economic and social council and the Police.

44. **Mr. Raja Zaib Shah** (Malaysia) said that his Government had demonstrated its commitment to gender mainstreaming by including the further empowerment of women in the tenth national plan for 2011-2015. Under its economic transformation programme it had set targets for increasing women's participation in the workforce. It had introduced income-generating programmes and other commercial agricultural activities for rural and indigenous women, which, in the long run, would improve food sustainability and family incomes. Another successful programme aimed to help Malaysians from low-income households, especially women, to generate more income and achieve economic independence.

45. His Government had made violence against women a high priority in its plan of action on the advancement of women. Through amendments to its legislation it had broadened the definition of rape and established stiffer penalties, addressed sexual harassment in the workplace and expanded the definition of domestic violence to include psychological as well as physical abuse. It had hosted the Women Deliver Conference, on obtaining high-level support and commitment to increase the allocation of resources to maternal health, in May 2013, and the Global Summit of Women, on the advancement of women's economic opportunities worldwide, in June 2013.

46. **Mr. Khan** (Indonesia) said that his Government supported the use of gender-sensitive policies and programmes and, through a gender-responsive planning and budgeting mechanism, was focusing on priority areas of development. It had adopted legislation on the elimination of domestic violence, citizenship and the eradication of trafficking in persons as well as national action plans on human rights, and on the prevention of violence against children. It was providing wider access to credit for women entrepreneurs through subsidized microfinance schemes; in addition, better Internet access had allowed women to work more productively and had improved their access to markets. Women micro-entrepreneurs received training in financial management and investment, and women working in the private sector also received training in leadership and business to improve their promotion prospects.

47. National law and policies were being harmonized to empower women to enter politics and participate fully in the decision-making process. In preparation for

the 2014 general election, his Government was engaged in advocacy and capacity-building activities for women.

48. **Ms. Sabja** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that her Government had made significant progress towards the equal political participation of women and men. The new elections act guaranteed gender parity among candidates, and women, including many indigenous women, comprised one third of the members of the constituent assembly and half of the cabinet, and were well represented in both chambers of the legislative assembly.

49. The Bolivian Constitution guaranteed women's access to education, health and social services, natural resources and land ownership. Under her Government's land reforms, land had been granted to 170,000 people, almost half of whom were women, including many indigenous and rural women, and the property rights of married women, including women in common law relationships, were protected. In March 2013 her Government had approved a law to prevent violence against women and punish the perpetrators. Her Government had introduced a mother-child voucher programme which had brought about a sharp reduction in maternal and infant mortality and child malnutrition. It had reduced the school dropout rate for girls through the Juancito Pinto voucher programme.

50. **Ms. Al Amiri** (United Arab Emirates) said that her country was proud of its achievements in the area of advancement and empowerment of women. Government had succeeded in eliminating poverty through a number of policies aimed at raising incomes, particularly those of women. It guaranteed free education up to and including the university level for all citizens. The country had one of the highest rates of girls' school enrolment in the world and the highest percentage of females with advanced degrees. The United Arab Emirates was also working to strengthen the right to education for girls in low-income countries through its Dubai Cares initiative. The concept of reproductive health had been expanded to encompass not only the provision of maternity care but also services for all women during all stages of life. Infant mortality had dropped to 7.5 per 1000 and life expectancy had risen to 78 years for women and 75 years for men.

51. In the area of economic empowerment, her Government 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 and businesswomen managed investment projects valued at over 5 billion dirhams. At the political level, 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. Women also held posts in the diplomatic, judicial, legislative, law enforcement, military and security sectors. Her country was currently finalizing a national strategy on the advancement of women for 2013 to 2017.

52. 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. Within the framework of the United Kingdom-led initiative to combat sexual violence in conflict, the United Arab Emirates had also contributed one million pounds sterling to build capacity to combat sexual violence in Somalia.

53. **Ms. Al-Derham** (Qatar) said that the political, social and economic rights of women were enshrined in the Constitution of Qatar and in legislation. Qatar was committed to implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in line with the Islamic Sharia and Qatar's social values. Strengthening women's human rights was linked to the effective consolidation of the rights and responsibilities of the family, as the natural and fundamental unit of society. Her Government had made great efforts to improve women's education and to facilitate women's participation in the labour market and at the highest levels of Government and private-sector institutions. As a result, the percentage of women in the work force was on the rise, as were their numbers in ministerial-level positions. Her Government's national vision 2030 policy provided for strengthening women's capacities and empowering women to participate economically and politically, especially as decision-makers. It was also working to incorporate women's issues into all national plans and strategies, especially those relating to decent work and social protection.

54. Guaranteeing the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by women and girls, as well as their effective participation in society was vital to ending sexual violence against women in conflict situations. In that connection, her Government had

endorsed the recently issued Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict Situations.

55. Women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan continued to suffer violations of their rights under the Israeli occupation, which deprived them of their basic rights to education, health care, security and freedom of movement. Women in Syria were also suffering due to the terrorism and atrocities inflicted upon them by the Syrian regime, including physical and sexual assaults, arbitrary arrest and detention. Such deeds constituted war crimes and crimes against humanity whose perpetrators must be brought to justice. In order to better protect women and girls from gender-based violence during conflict, the relevant laws must be applied without discrimination or selectivity and with the cooperation of all parties to the conflict. It would be possible to achieve a world free of all forms of violence against women if joint efforts were made to raise awareness and encourage an outlook that repudiated violence against women among all groups in society, and if harsher penalties were imposed on the perpetrators of such violence.

56. **Ms. Velichko** (Belarus) said that her delegation welcomed the increasing attention paid to gender issues in United Nations resolutions but believed that the United Nations should make fuller use of its technical capacities to provide assistance to States in promoting gender equality on the ground. It was important for UN-Women to become more involved in the work of United Nations Development Programme country offices.

57. Equal rights and freedoms for women and men were guaranteed under the laws of Belarus. Her Government had achieved Millennium Development Goal 3 ahead of schedule and was continuing to implement the fourth national plan of action to ensure gender equality 2011-2015 with a view to advancing the socioeconomic status of women, developing gender education and preventing domestic violence. It had introduced indicators and targets to ensure gender parity in management and decision-making. The number of unemployed women had fallen because of changes in women's labour law. Her Government promoted women's employment through job fairs, vocational training, loans to employers and assistance to women entrepreneurs. Women and men had equal access to education; 55 per cent of working women had

higher or secondary education qualifications and the number of women with advanced scientific training was increasing.

58. Since the family was the key social institution for the establishment of gender roles, her Government's family policy aimed to help people combine their professional and family commitments. Support was provided to families with young children through labour, housing and tax subsidies. Labour legislation was designed to protect the reproductive role of women and allowed any family member to take time off work to care for young children. Because many more women than men had taken advantage of such measures, schools for fathers had been established to ensure that they assumed their family responsibilities.

59. Every year since 2006, her Government had carried out public awareness-raising campaigns as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence Campaign. It had established crisis rooms and telephone hotlines to support victims of violence and human trafficking. In June 2013 the national assembly had passed an act defining domestic violence and establishing preventive measures, and in August 2013 legislative amendments had entered into force making it an administrative offence to cause physical or mental suffering to close relatives, even where the formal elements of a crime were not present. A network of non-governmental organizations had been working since August 2012 to prevent domestic violence, assist victims and promote the adoption of legislation.

60. **Ms. Chaladmanakul** (Thailand), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the voices of many women and girls remained unheard and that they were exposed to violence, poverty and lack of opportunity. Member States should take concrete action to address the root causes of those problems. Social stigmatization hindered girls' access to education, which was the key to their empowerment; the problem was particularly acute for girls in rural areas. Her Government had achieved Millennium Development Goal 3 ahead of the 2015 deadline through the elimination of educational inequality in primary and lower secondary education; its objective now was to provide equal access to secondary education by 2015 and to enhance formal, non-formal and alternative education over the period 2013 to 2016.

61. **Ms. Suwiwattanachai** (Thailand), speaking as a youth delegate, said that her Government was

committed to improving women's employment and incomes. The Thai women's empowerment fund was designed to build women's capacities and opportunities and to enhance their leadership skills with a view to their participation in the global community and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Community. The office of the basic education commission aimed to provide 15 years of free education to girls in order to strengthen their basic knowledge, prevent them from being exploited and prepare them for participation in the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs' Network. The social inclusion of underprivileged women and girls and the establishment of a forum in which they could voice their concerns were essential. Women's advancement must continue until inequality was eradicated.

62. **Mr. Dehghani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his Government had made every effort to strengthen the family, which was essential to women's dignity and empowerment, with a view to ensuring the sustainability of the family and of religious beliefs and achieving better living standards in the future. UN-Women should take a family-based approach, with respect for divine and moral values and each country's specific cultural and religious characteristics. Gender equality and women's empowerment should be included as a stand-alone goal and integrated into all goals of any development framework beyond 2015 through targets and indicators.

63. The proportion of Iranian women in many professions and in appointed and elected office was among the highest in the region. Women had played a vital role in the 2013 elections. To prevent violence against women, a bill on women's security was being debated in parliament. It defined all forms of violence against women, established a national committee to safeguard women from violence, and determined the duties of executive and judiciary bodies in addressing such violence. Respect for women's rights had been given a high priority in the citizenship bill. His Government had appointed the first ever spokeswoman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and three women Vice-Presidents.

64. **Mr. Medan** (Croatia) said that his Government was combating gender discrimination through the act on gender equality and the national policy for gender equality for the period 2011-2015. At the international level, it was committed to the empowerment of women, particularly in post-conflict and transition

States. Its development policy was focused on education, health and small businesses for women. It had joined the Equal Futures Partnership and was implementing a national action plan to promote women's political participation.

65. His Government believed that greater efforts were required to raise awareness among men and women of gender equality and the unacceptability of justifying gender-based violence by tradition or culture. The education of women and girls was essential to the development and stability of societies, particularly during and after conflict. Croatia was proud to have been declared a champion country for the Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative and had focused its development cooperation on the education and economic empowerment of Afghan women and girls. In June 2013 it had signed the Arms Trade Treaty, which contained a binding provision on gender-based violence.

66. The rights of female victims of sexual violence in conflict required special protection. His Government therefore welcomed the appointment of the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Croatia would play a prominent role in preventing such violence through its membership of the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. On the basis of Croatia's tragic experience of the use of rape as a means of terror during the 1991-1995 conflict, his Government was drafting legislation to award the status of "civilian victim of war" to survivors of sexual violence, assisting law enforcement bodies in the prosecution of perpetrators, and encouraging victims to come forward for justice. The provisions of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security must be implemented. In its capacity as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Croatia was proud to have organized, along with UN Women, the ministerial event on women's economic empowerment for peacebuilding held during the high-level segment of the current session.

67. **Mr. Khan** (Pakistan) said that Pakistan's Constitution guaranteed women's full participation in national life. Successive governments had taken various steps to eliminate discrimination against women and promote their rights. Women participated in all areas of life, even the armed forces.; Pakistan had had the first woman Prime Minister and the first women speaker of the national assembly in the entire Islamic world.

68. The shooting by terrorists of Malala Yousafzai in 2012 had rallied support in Pakistan and throughout the world for the right of girls to education. His Government's strategy for women's empowerment was based on combating the feminization of poverty, promoting gender equality, ending violence against women and introducing legislation for their protection and empowerment. A national commission on the status of women had been set up in 2000 and given financial and administrative autonomy in 2012. An ombudsperson had been appointed to protect women against workplace harassment. His Government had passed laws to protect women from acid crimes, discrimination, workplace harassment and domestic violence, and promoted the economic empowerment of women through direct financial assistance, microfinance, vocational training and employment opportunities.

69. Although the national commission for human development had helped make 2 million more rural women functionally literate, the female literacy rate remained at only 40 per cent in rural areas, compared to 70 per cent in cities. His Government's efforts to promote women's literacy and job opportunities were supported by an independent judiciary, a free media, a vibrant civil society and a growing private sector, which helped redress violations and raise awareness of women's rights. In that regard, the international community must honour its official development assistance commitments for women's projects.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

70. **Mr. Umemoto** (Japan), responding to the statement by the representative of the Republic of Korea, said that his Government had expressed its heartfelt apologies for the harm it had done to many nations in the past, particularly in Asia. The Japanese Government and people were deeply pained by the immeasurable suffering of "comfort women". Japan had addressed claims, including claims by such women, through the San Francisco Peace Treaty and through bilateral instruments with the countries concerned, and had paid reparations accordingly. The 1965 *Agreement on the settlement of problems concerning property and claims and economic co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea* had confirmed that problems concerning property rights and claims between the contracting parties and their nationals had been settled completely and finally.

To help alleviate the suffering of former "comfort women", however, the Asian Women's Fund had been set up with a contribution of 4.8 billion yen from his Government and private donors. His Government had supported the activities of the Fund's medical and welfare support programme, provided atonement money of 2 million yen per person, raised through private donations, and a letter of apology to each former "comfort woman" from the Prime Minister, and engaged in the Fund's follow-up activities. It regretted that the Japanese people's sincere feelings on the matter had not been positively received in the Republic of Korea and would make every effort to make those feelings understood.

71. **Mr. Sul** Kyung-hoon (Republic of Korea) said that the Government of Japan should assume its legal responsibility and take measures acceptable to the victims of Japanese military sexual slavery in the Second World War, as recommended by United Nations human rights mechanisms. His Government was deeply concerned that Japan continued to deny its legal responsibility towards those 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 a war crime under international humanitarian law and, under defined circumstances, might constitute a crime against humanity. The issue had never been addressed in the course of negotiating the 1965 *Agreement* and 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.

72. **Mr. Umemoto** (Japan) said that the position of his Government was as previously stated.

73. **Mr. Sul Kyung-hoon** (Republic of Korea) reiterated that the issue had not been addressed in the 1965 *Agreement* and that many human rights treaty bodies had expressed concern in their conclusions and recommendations over the Government of Japan’s failure to assume responsibility for the “comfort women” system. The perpetrators had never been prosecuted and the compensation had been financed by private donors rather than the Japanese Government. The matter could be resolved only when Japan accepted its legal responsibility pursuant to the recommendations of the human rights treaty bodies.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.