



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MS. AQEELAH AKBAR, COUNSELLOR, PERMANENT MISSION OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 56: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, TO THE THIRD COMMITTEE, 63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (New York, 13 October 2008)

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 56: Advancement of Women. We would like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports submitted under this important agenda item.

The Group of 77 and China reaffirms its support for and commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly as the guiding policy frameworks for gender equality and the empowerment of women. The international community further committed to promote gender equality and empower women at the Millennium Summit as one of eight goals to achieve sustainable people-centered development. Accordingly, every effort should be made to improve women's health, enhance their capacities, increase their access to resources and opportunities and minimize their vulnerabilities to violence and conflict.

Mr. Chairman,

Although there have been advances in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, the G77 and China believes that there is insufficient progress toward achieving millennium development goal 3. Enormous challenges are ahead. The recent global economic crisis undermines the efforts of countries of the South to meet their commitments agreed at several United Nations summits and conferences. The feminization of poverty is growing because of the financial crisis and today, millions of women and girls have no access to food, medicines, shelter, or are victims of violence.

This situation impedes the population of affected countries, in particular women and children, from the full achievement of economic and social development. It creates obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights, including the right of everyone to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being and their right to food, medical care and the necessary social services.

Given the current global food crisis, women today are more concerned than ever about the fate of the family. In some regions, more than 50 per cent of food is produced by rural women and we note that female-headed households spend a greater proportion of their income on food. In this regard, G77 and China reaffirms that a development-oriented result of the current Doha Round negotiations, food security, agricultural productivity as well as the cancellation of foreign debt, among other factors, are critical to reduce persistent levels of poverty and hunger in developing countries.

In terms of education, while there has been significant progress in achieving universal primary

education, on the one hand, there has not been sufficient progress in access to quality education. The G77 and China recognizes the results of South-South Cooperation initiatives in the area of eliminating illiteracy that support the efforts of developing countries to achieve the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Additionally, upgrading women's skills through education and training will expand their opportunities to participate in the global economy and thereby improve the welfare of the family.

Mr. Chairman,

Another critical factor to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women is the elimination of violence against women. Violence against women occurs in every country in the world and is a gross violation of human rights and an obstacle to achieving the MDGs. As a follow-up to the 2006 In-depth Study on all forms of Violence against Women, the Group of 77 and China acknowledges the launch in February of this year, of the Secretary-General's multi-year campaign, United to end Violence against Women (UNite) which is intended to intensify action and political will and increased resources to end violence against women and girls. In this regard, we would like to receive information on the activities undertaken thus far by the campaign. We also note UNIFEM's Say NO to Violence against Women Campaign and congratulate those Governments that have committed themselves to enforce legislation and implement national action plans that would contribute to the effective prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women.

The persistence of conflicts in various parts of the world is a major impediment to the elimination of all forms of violence against women. The international community must place particular focus on and give priority attention to the plight of women living under foreign occupation and ensure that where gross violations are committed against them, all perpetrators are prosecuted and punished to avoid impunity, and to ensure that their basic and inalienable rights are guaranteed. The attainment of peace is a pre-requisite for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDGs, particularly in the area of the advancement of women.

With regard to the status of women in the UN system, the G77 and China is seriously concerned that the official report of the Secretary-General on this subject has not been published within the timeframe mandated by the system. We hope that in the future, the report will be made available in due time for consideration by member States. Having reached the mid-point to the MDG target date, we continue to be concerned about the less than satisfactory achievement of gender parity within the UN system. The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women reports a modest increase in the percentage of women in the UN System in the professional and higher categories from 37.7 per cent as of 31 December 2006 to 38.4 per cent as of 31 December 2007, with UNITAR and UNFPA being the only two of 31 entities having achieved overall gender balance.

Gender imbalance is also exhibited in intergovernmental bodies. As of January 2008, with the exception of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the CEDAW Committee, women represent only 23 per cent of the members of the seven human rights treaty bodies. This inability to reach gender parity is extremely discouraging to the Group of 77 and China as we have consistently fought to achieve equitable geographic representation of women in the UN system.

We therefore call on the Secretariat to seriously intensify efforts to achieve gender balance within the UN system, respecting the principle of equitable geographic representation at headquarters and in field offices.

The G77 and China continues to appreciate the work of the International Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and recalls the specific mandate of the Institute as a central focal point for research and training on gender issues within the United Nations system.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China concurs with one of the key elements emanating from the UN MDG High-level meeting held last month, that health-related MDGs continue to pose a daunting challenge. Little to no progress has been achieved in reducing maternal mortality rates in many developing countries. Latest estimates indicate that more than 500,000 women still die each year from treatable and preventable complications during pregnancy and childbirth, such as obstetric fistula. The G77 and China commends the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and its partners for their ongoing efforts in this area.

Despite many achievements in the advancement of women at the policy and political levels, significant hurdles remain to achieve MDG3 by 2015. It is estimated that approximately \$13 billion annually is required for financing to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in the context of the MDGs.

Notwithstanding the commitments undertaken, including those made by governments at the Monterrey Conference, some developing countries are still unable to allocate sufficient resources to programmes dedicated to the empowerment of women. Achieving gender equality and empowerment of women objectives will require a reallocation of resources and additional and predictable sources of financing.

The Group of 77 and China acknowledges the usefulness of creating greater awareness of gender-responsive budgeting initiatives that are designed to determine resource needs and financing gaps at the national level. At the same time, developing countries can benefit from the assistance of the international community to help build their capacity in this regard.

Finally, Mr. Chairman

The G77 and China reaffirms that full achievement of the MDGs requires an enhanced level of commitment and an effective global partnership for development. The ongoing global economic, food, energy and climate crises, weak support from international financial institutions, the continuous decline of Official Development Assistance and the lingering effects of structural adjustment measures are some of the obstacles that hinder developing countries from meeting the MDGs.

We therefore encourage the international community to honour its commitments to ODA, as well as promote international cooperation in the field of technology transfer, information and data-sharing and technical assistance. It must also commit to debt relief and the opening up of markets to give opportunities, particularly to women entrepreneurs, and remove obstacles to exports from least developed countries. Increased development assistance in the areas of education, health and employment is equally crucial to eliminating gender disparities. By translating commitments into actions, the Group of 77 and China is looking forward to the comprehensive achievement of the MDGs, especially MDG3, by 2015.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.