

STATEMENT BY HAJIA AISHA M.S. ISMAIL, THE HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR WOMEN AFFAIRS AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA, ON WOMEN 2000: GENDER EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, AT THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York, 7 June 2000

Mr. President,

The Group of 77 and China, on whose behalf I am addressing this Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, is indeed pleased to see you preside over this historic Session on “Women 2000: Gender equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first century”. With your wealth of experience, and the outstanding leadership you have demonstrated over the years, particularly since the commencement of the 54th Session of the UNGA, the Group is confident that this historic meeting of the General Assembly, will be crowned with success.

Mr. President,

Five years ago, at the Fourth World Conference on Women in China, representatives from 189 countries, adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. That was a demonstration of a reaffirmed international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for all women of the world. It represented a concerted effort to advance the global, regional and national agenda for empowerment of women.

This Review Conference presents us with an opportunity, to share experiences, identify areas of progress and challenges confronting us in the struggle for women’s empowerment and gender equality.

For us in the developing countries, the implementation of the Platform for Action, in practically all the critical areas of concern, has been a remarkable experience. While progress has been recorded in certain areas, there have been difficulties in others. Let me, therefore, begin with a brief remark on our efforts.

For developing countries today the quest for poverty eradication and improvement of education and health for women and girls remains a top priority. In pursuit of these goals developing countries have reviewed and strengthened policies and programmes with a special focus on the needs of women.

The issue of violence against women has also received, and continues to receive a lot of attention in many developing countries. There have been policy, legal and institutional reforms to tackle all forms of violence against women. The adoption of the Optional protocol to the CEDAW by the 54th session of the United Nations General Assembly is a landmark achievement. This will further enhance the promotion and protection of the human rights of women. In addition, there has been an increase in the participation and representation of women in the decision making and political levels.

The implementation of the Platform for Action has facilitated gender mainstreaming

policies and programmes at both national, regional and international levels. These various initiatives contribute towards the achievement of the goals of gender equality, peace and development.

Mr. President,

Despite these achievements, it is imperative for us to recognize that our destination is still considerably far away. For, new challenges have not only emerged, but old obstacles still persist.

Since Beijing, the world has witnessed a lot of radical transformation in the area of computer and information technology, and one word that captures that transformation is Globalization.

Indeed globalization has reduced the world to a global village facilitating rapid transfer of knowledge, massive cross-cultural interaction among people and broadening peoples mind thus creating a heterogeneous global community. Undoubtedly globalization has opened up opportunities for the creation of more wealth and the improvement of social life for some parts of the world.

Mr. President,

While the benefits of globalization have been recognized, the reality is that developing countries have been at a disadvantage. But more importantly, for this Conference, it is important to acknowledge that the negative impact of globalization is felt more by women of the developing countries. It is therefore necessary to critically examine how the issue of globalization is impacting on the empowerment of women in the developing world to enable the development of appropriate programmes, and harness the opportunities presented by this new trend.

In this connection however, there is a need for the international community to recognize the basic fact, that it is the inherent weakness of the economies and institutional structures of many developing countries which make it extremely difficult for them to cope with the forces of globalization. This inadequacy hampers effective implementation of programmes and projects for the advancement of women in these societies. This makes it imperative for the international community to support their efforts at the national level to meet the challenges of a globalized economy. We must similarly act to strengthen international cooperation for development by ensuring the creation of an appropriate international environment supportive of sustainable and equitable growth for developing countries. This will facilitate and promote the effective implementation of the Platform for Action in general, and the critical areas of concern in particular.

Mr. President,

A further impediment to the global commitment for gender equality is the debt burden, and the painful implementation of structural adjustment programmes, which hang like a millstone around the necks of many countries in the developing world. In spite of the willingness and cooperation of some countries of the developed world to relieve or cancel bilateral debt and through initiatives such as the Heavy Indebted Poor Countries, the debt burden of the developing world, particularly, in Africa still remains very high.

Financial flows have been virtually at a standstill in recent years, as such the financial

distress of individual countries has been further aggravated by stagnant export earnings as commodity prices continue to fall. Most indebted countries are as a result unable to fulfill commitments on their debt payments and debt servicing continues to cripple the economies of the indebted countries and impoverish their people, disproportionately more so the women and their families.

Mr. President,

Certainly, debt cancellation can release the much needed vital resources and enable developing countries to commence the process of rehabilitation of the totally destroyed social sector. Freedom from the debt burden will provide the means which can positively impact on the provision of basic social services to the people.

In addition, most developing countries carry the burden of a weak health sector characterized by inadequate services. This is due, among other things to low capacity for adequate investment in health care in general. The total budget of developing countries in the health sector is not up to 10% of the overall budget of one developed country. Given such a situation, developing countries not only have to cope with killer diseases such as malaria, typhoid, cholera etc. that still ravage our population, these countries have also been devastated hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This crisis is threatening to reverse our modest gains in the field of human resources development. Certainly with such a grim situation, debt cancellation at this point in time becomes the right of the poor, so that vital resources could be released to redress a critical situation in a critical area of human survival.

Mr. President,

In the overall struggle for gender equality and advancement of women, we must acknowledge the contributions of, and pay tribute to the numerous non-governmental organizations and civil society groups around the world. They have played a prominent role, as one of the formidable driving forces behind the goal of gender equality and advancement of women. They have also been instrumental in advancing the continuing debates on gender, development and peace on top of the agenda at the national and international level. Their untiring efforts in making information available, changing individual attitudes and setting the agenda for public dialogue have been crucial to integrating women's issues into the mainstream of the development discourse. These organisations have given true meaning to the power of the people to effect changes in their lives. The challenge before us is to continue to expand and strengthen the cooperative links with the civil society to advance the course of women.

Mr. President,

We are very united against the horrendous crime of trafficking in women and children which today is universally acknowledged as a crime against humanity; we are united in our abhorrence to conflicts that target women and children. We are also committed to justice for women and for all, at the national, regional and international level.

In conclusion, Mr. President, let me on behalf of the Group of 77 and China reiterate that we remain committed to implementing the Platform for Action. We will continue to advance the agenda to which the world is committed.

We, therefore, look forward to this Special Session adopting further strategic initiatives to

advance gender equality, promote justice, development and peace in the new millennium.

I thank you.

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