

**Statement by Ms. Sonia Elliott, Representative of the Republic of Guyana, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, on agenda items 109 & 110: Advancement of Women; and Implementation of the Outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, in the Third Committee of the 54th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

**New York, 11 October 1999**

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Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I have the honour to speak to agenda items 109 and 110 entitled "Advancement of Women" and "Implementation of the Outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women" respectively.

At the outset, allow me to extend congratulations to you and other members of the bureau on your election, and our best wishes for a successful session of the Third Committee. Our appreciation is also extended to the Secretary-General for the useful reports before us today as well as to the distinguished presenters who have provided a clear overview of the challenges that still remain to efforts to promote the advancement of women.

Mr. Chairman, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women is widely recognized as a sound basis for positive action for gender equality and the social, economic and political empowerment of women worldwide. The twelve critical areas of concern contained therein highlight the varied factors inhibiting women's empowerment poverty, unequal and inadequate access to education and health care, gender-based violence, armed conflicts, limited access to economic resources, women's marginal role in power sharing and decision-making, as well as persistent discrimination against and violation of the human rights of women and the girl child. At the same time, the strategic objectives and actions proposed by the Platform for Action have provided clear guidance on forward-looking strategies for the improvement of the status of women.

It was therefore fitting that last July during the Substantive Session of the Economic and Social Council, our Ministers addressed the issue of "employment and poverty eradication for the empowerment and advancement of women", and their communiqué contained recommendations that built upon the consensus reached in Beijing in 1995. In recognizing that women still constitute the majority of people living in poverty, the Ministers underscored the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies aimed at poverty eradication and employment generation. They also emphasized the close link between the eradication of poverty and women not only having equal access to productive resources, opportunities and public services but also participating in the planning, decision making and implementation of strategies. Similarly, they pointed to the continued marginalisation of and discrimination against women in the economy, including the labour market, and noted the need for a proactive gender policy requiring equal access and girls and women to education and training, removal of wage differentials, the guarantee to women and men of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, the equal access to high-level and decision-making occupations as well as a reduction of the gap in unemployment rates between women and men, including through job-creation policies.

The Group of 77 and China takes this opportunity to reaffirm the importance of the goals established in Beijing whose continuing relevance is reflected in the Ministerial Communiqué of the high-level segment of the 1999 Substantive Session of the ECOSOC. It is our hope that as we prepare for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Platform for Action, the deliberations of ECOSOC as well as those in April of the Commission on the Status of Women will serve as effective building blocks for our task in the year 2000.

Turning to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Group wishes to reiterate its firm support for the Commission's efforts to monitor the situation of women worldwide and in so doing, make recommendations and policy suggestions to promote women's rights. The agreed conclusions that emerged from the Commission's consideration of health issues affecting women and of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, have recognized that despite some progress, a lot of work still needed to be done to achieve the goals of Beijing. Violence against women persists. Likewise, the growing phenomenon of substance abuse among women, the health risks of female genital mutilation, poor nutritional, physical and mental health care as well as the fact that women are twice as likely to be infected as men by the HIV/AIDS virus, remain a source of deep concern. The Commission concluded that education was key as an impetus for positive change and at the same time, it highlighted the importance of a comprehensive legal framework to address the special needs of female migrant workers as well as women and children victims of sexual exploitation and conflict situations.

Mr. Chairman, this year marks the twentieth anniversary since the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was opened for signature. It is indeed significant that during this anniversary year and on the eve of a new millennium, the General Assembly has adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women will undoubtedly continue to play an important role in the overview of the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol as part of efforts to promote gender equality and the protection of the inherent rights of women.

Mr. Chairman, at this time, I wish to recognize the excellent work being done by the Office of the Special Adviser for the Advancement of Women as well as the United Nations Development Fund for Women in promoting gender-sensitive policies and leadership as well as women's rights and role in the productive economy. The Group looks forward to working closely with these two offices, particularly during the preparatory process for the Special Session next year.

Likewise, a most welcoming development are efforts underway to revitalize the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. The Group firmly believes that the Institute has a meaningful role to play in preparations for the Beijing + 5 review process. We would again call for it to be a primary focal point for the diverse research being undertaken on gender issues and we would urge all countries to provide the Institute with much-needed financial resources to enable it to emerge from its current financial straits.

With specific reference to resources for the Institute, the Group is aware that a donors' meeting will be convened this month to examine the situation of the Institute. It is our hope that the report requested of the Secretary-General through ECOSOC resolution 1999/54 on a new structure and working method for the Institute, will be available in due time for consideration by participants at that meeting. At the same time, the Group notes with regret that to date we have not received that report which was scheduled to be considered by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. We believe that this report as well as the relevant sections of the report of ECOSOC on the issue of the advancement of women, which are still outstanding, would have provided an important contribution to the deliberations of the Third Committee.

Mr. Chairman, political will and commitment at both the national and international levels are indeed necessary prerequisites for achieving the goals of Beijing. We often overlook the impact of economic policies including those of structural adjustment, on women and children particularly those living in poverty. And indeed, the recent financial crisis in Asia has indicated that women were the first to be affected by the changes to the economy. For most developing countries, unfavourable terms of trade, inadequate markets for national products and high debt servicing bills have meant substantially reduced investment in the social sector. Nevertheless, social services remain vital for women, especially those who are heads of household. Women in the rural areas also bear a disproportionate burden of any shortfall of resources.

The Group of 77 and China would therefore appeal to the international community to be cognizant of the pivotal role of sustained domestic economic growth and an enabling international environment for the advancement and empowerment of women.

In concluding, Mr. Chairman, I wish to emphasize that the Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action requires a strong partnership amongst governments, civil society and the international community. Such a partnership will enable all stakeholders to overcome the socio-economic obstacles and entrenched attitudes and practices that perpetuate inequality and discrimination against women in all parts of the world. The Group believes that with rededication and strengthening of our resolve, we can indeed advance the goals of "equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity".

I thank you.