



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY HE AMBASSADOR DUMISANI S KUMALO, SOUTH AFRICAN PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 61: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, AT THE 61ST SESSION OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (New York, 9 October 2006)

Chairperson,

The Group of 77 and China wishes to thank the various speakers this morning for their informative and thought-provoking presentations under this agenda item on the advancement of women.

Chairperson,

Through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we made a collective commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women. By doing so, we committed ourselves to the promotion of sustainable development, peace and security because gender equality and the empowerment of women are objectives in themselves and the means to achieve overall progress in development. We identified the promotion of gender equality as one of the most effective and sustainable ways to eradicate poverty, hunger and disease and to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. This is in recognition of the important role of women as the engines of development and agents of change.

We believe that an enabling environment is an important precondition to the full realization of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. In this regard, the Group is concerned that the achievement of these goals are hindered by situations such as natural disasters, armed conflict, foreign occupation and unilateral coercive measures, which disrupt and even undo advancement already made.

The Group is of the view that we should not lose sight of the importance of gender mainstreaming as a global strategy for achieving gender equality. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences, an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and so that inequality is not perpetuated. In short, gender mainstreaming should situate gender equality issues at the centre of analysis, policy decisions, plans, programmes, monitoring, budgetary subvention and institutional structures.

Chairperson,

In the past year, the UN has held several meetings such as the World Summit on Information Society; the High-Level Meeting on HIV and AIDS; the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development; and the High-Level Meeting on the Midterm Comprehensive Global Review of the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010. The Group is pleased to note that a gender perspective was reflected in the deliberations and outcomes of these events.

However, we are concerned that all the noble goals of these major events are yet to be reached, as we are still faced with unprecedented feminization of poverty and pandemics such as HIV and Aids, and general marginalization of women in every human activity with the majority of the world's poor being women. Rural and migrant women, continue to be exposed to inhumane conditions; women, including women under foreign occupation, are still victims of multiple forms of discrimination, violence, conflicts and its consequences. Women are still denied access to information technology, education and health. Access to all levels of decision-making bodies remains slow and uneven.

Chairperson,

It is indeed important that all the various components of gender mainstreaming are taken into account within the United Nations system, including the principle of 50/50 gender balance with full respect for the principle of equitable geographical distribution of women. Although some progress has been made, the Group is deeply disappointed by the statistics presented in the report of the Secretary-General on the status of women in the UN system, contained in document A/61/318. The report illustrates the lack of progress, even regression, in achieving the goal of equitable geographic representation and 50/50 gender distribution, especially at senior and policy-making levels in the UN system.

A concerted effort should be made by senior management in the UN system to implement policies and strategies to

accelerate progress towards that end and to support the efforts of Member States from the developing world to establish and promote mechanisms to encourage women to apply for positions in the UN system, including in areas where women are underrepresented, such as peacekeeping and peacebuilding, as well as other non-traditional areas.

Chairperson,

We would like to caution on recent developments regarding the formative stages of the gender branches in other instances of the UN system, such as the one established by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. For the Group, it is essential that the operation of such branches, created with the noble aim to promote and protect women's human rights should not be in conflict with the existing partnership between the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Commission on the Status of Women. The fact is that the Commission on the Status of Women has a broad mandate covering from women's human rights to other social and economic dimensions of the issue.

Chairperson,

We believe that central to the eradication of poverty among women, is the importance of increasing their education and training opportunities, especially in the area of science and technology, including ICT. Education of women decreases child mortality and improves the health of the family. It improves their chances of employment and therefore the welfare of society in general. Women become more aware of their rights which in turn, contribute to increasing their level of political participation and representation in decision-making processes.

Women's advancement can only be achieved if women's health needs at basic levels are addressed. To fight against the spread of HIV and AIDS, TB and Malaria and other infectious diseases would be to improve the health of women and girls who remain disproportionately affected by these scourges.

When debating migration, we acknowledge the very important contribution made by migrants to the development of countries of destination. We should also continue to recognise the increasing feminization of international migration which requires that we must be sensitive to the circumstances and experiences of female migrants who tend to be disadvantaged in the migration experience. We must therefore adopt measures to reduce the vulnerability, exploitation and abuse of female migrants.

The elimination of conflict and the attainment of peace is a pre-requisite for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The persistence of conflicts and foreign occupation is a major impediment to the advancement of women. Conflicts accentuate poverty among women. They lead to loss of employment and education opportunities, compromises women's health and increase women's vulnerability to sexual violence.

Chairperson,

The much-awaited study of the Secretary-General on Violence against Women, contained in document A/61/122 add 1, deserves special mention. We concur with the statement made by the Secretary-General that we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace, as long as all forms of violence against women and girls continue in all parts of the world. The increase of incidents of violence against women and girls is disturbing. There is an urgent need for all of us to address this critical problem facing our countries, together. It is a scourge that makes it difficult for us to enjoy the gains we make in other sectors, as all violent acts have a serious impact on the family, the community and the nation as a whole. We hope that the Study would help us determine how to more effectively address this unacceptable violation of the rights of women.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable work and efforts of Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues (OSAGI) and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in the preparation of the study, and of other UN entities such as the UNFPA and UNIFEM in providing assistance to developing countries in the fight against violence against women and fostering women's empowerment and gender equality. Furthermore, the Group strongly supports the work of the United Nations Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), which has forged collaborative partnerships with UN entities to work towards the elimination of violence against women

In conclusion Chairperson,

The G77 and China reaffirms that as developing countries take actions to address these challenges at the national level, there is also a need to enhance international cooperation and global partnership. For the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the international community should honour its commitments to ODA. It should remove the

