



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY MR. SIVU MAQUNGO,  
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE  
UNITED NATIONS, AT THE 50TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN  
(Monday, 27 February 2006)**

Madame Chair,

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, we congratulate you on your election as Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women at its 50th session. We would also like to assure you and the other members of the Bureau, of our wholehearted support.

We look forward to the deliberations on the thematic and emerging issues before us, as well as the Secretary-General's proposals for enhancing the methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women through the development of the multi-year programme of work for the period 2007-2009. The G77 and China believes that the future themes and improvement of the methods of work of the Commission should aim to promote and strengthen gender equality and the advancement of women and enhance the Commission's role in gender mainstreaming.

Madame Chair,

The Group of 77 and China would like to express its appreciation to the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women for its ongoing work in coordinating the system-wide implementation of gender mainstreaming into the United Nations in particular through the Inter-Agency Network of Women and Gender Equality.

The G77 and China also notes with satisfaction that as a result of the revitalization process, the International Research and Training Institute for Women (INSTRAW) is now better positioned to contribute to women's empowerment, gender equality, engendering the MDGs and gender mainstreaming throughout the UN system. Commitments of sufficient resources from Member States are indispensable to securing the medium and long-term sustainability needed in order for the Institute to fully comply with its mandates.

The focus of the 50th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, is on two thematic issues which are outlined in the Commission's last multi-year programme of work for 2006, namely: "Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work"; and "Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels." These themes are indeed of great importance to the Group of 77 and China.

The discussion of these two themes comes at an opportune time as we look back at 60 years of existence of this Organisation. We are reminded by the preamble of the United Nations Charter, which in part says, "To reaffirm faith in the fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of man and women and of the nations large and small...and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom."

Despite these noble goals, we are still faced with unprecedented feminization of poverty with 70 per cent of the world's poor being women and general marginalization of women in every human activity. Women, especially rural and migrant women, continue to be exposed to inhuman conditions; Women are still victims of multiple forms of discrimination, domestic 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.

Madame Chair,

Through the Beijing Platform for Action, the Beijing+5 outcome document, the Millennium Declaration and most recently, at the 2005 World Summit, we made a collective global commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women. In so doing we committed ourselves to the promotion of human rights, sustainable development, peace and security. We identified the promotion of gender equality as one of the most effective and sustainable ways of combating poverty, hunger and disease. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are considered objectives in themselves and the means to achieve overall progress in development. This is in recognition of the pivotal role of women as engines of development and agents for change. Without women's empowerment and gender equality, our societies will not be able to achieve the MDGs and their full development potential.

An enabling environment is an important precondition to the full realization of the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDGs. In this regard, the Group of 77 and China 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 G77 and China agrees that creating an enabling environment for gender equality and empowerment of women, requires a comprehensive multisectoral approach with emphasis on education, health and employment, as well as increased participation and representation of women in decision-making processes at all levels. The G77 and China is pleased to note that in the last few months, we have seen the election of three women as Heads of States. However, increased participation of women in decision-making still needs to be translated into leadership and influence in decision-making processes. Obstacles that hinder women's effective participation, including their under-representation in almost all sectors and at all levels of decision-making, needs to be addressed.

Madame Chair,

The G77 and China believes that central to the reduction of poverty among women is the importance of increasing their educational and training opportunities. Education of women decreases child mortality and improves the health of the family. It improves their chances for employment and therefore the welfare of the family in general. Women become more aware of their rights which in turn, contributes to increasing their level of political participation and representation in decision-making processes. We agree that national budgets also need to be structured so as to enable women's access to education. Increasing access of girls and women to education and training in science and technology, including in ICT, is an area that needs to be improved. We should also seek to transform education systems and curricula to instill gender sensitivity and abolish stereotypes that continue to discriminate against girls. Education could serve as a vehicle for transforming attitudes, beliefs and entrenched social norms that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. Challenges remain in providing the necessary infrastructure such as availability of classrooms and qualified teachers.

Education for women is also directly related to the improvement of their health and well-being. Access of women to health care, increases their productivity and also helps to reduce maternal, as well as child mortality rates. To fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS, Malaria, Tuberculosis and other infectious diseases would be to improve the health of women and girls who are disproportionately affected by these scourges.

Madame Chair,

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), women comprise 70 per cent of the 1.3 billion people who live on less than a dollar a day. Women still spend more time than men in unpaid work. Furthermore, most of the female labour force is in the informal sector. The working conditions of rural and migrant women workers should be improved, by amongst others, increasing access to productive resources and further developing remittance procedures. In improving economic opportunities for women we should transform systems to remove wage disparities and make workplaces generally conducive for women. Policies and legislation should be put into place to ensure that women are also considered for employment opportunities even in the traditionally male-dominated sectors.

Madame Chair,

The persistence of conflicts is another major impediment to the advancement of women. The elimination of conflicts and the attainment of peace is a pre-requisite for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDGs. Conflicts exacerbate poverty among women. They lead to loss of employment, education opportunities and perpetuate their psychological trauma. It compromises their health and increases their vulnerability to sexual violence. The G77 and China believes that concerted efforts must be made to ensure that women are fully involved in all conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives, including at decision-making levels. As women tend to suffer disproportionately during times of unrest and instability, there is a need to mainstream gender perspectives in policies and programmes to ensure that the contribution, priorities and needs of both women and men are addressed.

In conclusion, the G77 and China is of the view that as 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 effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the international community should honour its commitments to Official Development Assistance. It must commit to debt relief and the opening of markets to give opportunities particularly to women entrepreneurs. Increased development assistance in such areas as education, health and job creation is vital towards eliminating gender disparities. With commitment, it is still possible to enhance the

I thank you.

