
Madame Chairperson,

Let me start by whole-heartedly thanking the Commission on the Status of Women, for the outstanding contribution it has made for advancing the cause of women all over the world. On behalf of the Pakistan delegation I want to acknowledge the valuable work done by the Commission in monitoring the implementation of the Beijing and Beijing + 5 documents. These documents are now complemented by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) all of which relate to women directly or indirectly. Achieving these goals is vital. The UN Secretary General himself has said “There is no time to loose if we are to reach the MDGs by the target date of 2015. Only by investing in the world’s women can we expect to get there”.

Madame Chairperson,

Let us pick up the threads of time from where we dropped them last year. Yesterday we talked about political empowerment of women in Pakistan and proudly shared with the Commission that we had 33% women in the local bodies and nearly 20 % in the Parliament. This made us leaders in our region. Today we want to tell you that twenty seven thousand women councilors have been trained under our Women’s Political Participation Programme also known as W3P and 1000 have become computer literate. The UN has selected W3P as a best practice from Pakistan.

The next logical step in this area is the creation of Women Political Schools by the middle of this year. These schools will be training academies for women aspiring to political office at various tiers of governance. The aim is to empower and equip these women with the skills necessary to legislate and serve their constituencies.

Out of a total of 234 women parliamentarians in Pakistan, 11 are Ministers in the Federal and Provincial Cabinets. Four are present in this hall today.

Madame Chairperson,

Yesterday we talked about honour killings and hadood laws. Today we would like to tell the Commission that we have a report from the Pakistan National Commission on the Status of Women on the hadood laws. The Commission, which was created three years ago, has examined these laws and has recommended their repeal. The report is being examined by the Government for appropriate action.

We also have legislation ready against honour killings. Soon it shall be submitted to the Cabinet and then to the Parliament.

Yesterday, we talked of economic empowerment of women. Today, it is the ‘Hunarmand Aurat’ – ‘talented woman’ and ‘Jafakash Aurat’ - ‘hard working woman’. The Hunarmand Aurat programme aims to provide a place for women entrepreneurs looking for opportunities to network together to foster growth and success in their business ventures using the concept of business incubation centers. The Jafakash Aurat project, is directed at rural women. The programme aims to provide microcredit for buying milch cattle and to sell milk from these cattle to dairy cooperatives. It will give rural women control over resources.
We will soon establish Women Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Pakistan. In this context we wrote to the Secretary General of SAARC. Our idea has been accepted. Pakistan will host the Conference of SAARC Business Women in September 2004.

Yesterday, it was the problem of the girl child and her education and health and today we have a successful project namely “Tawana Health Pakistan”. This is a school feeding programme for girls in 5,300 schools in the poorest 29 rural districts of Pakistan and will benefit more than half a million girls. Total cost of the programme is around US $ 60 million.

Madame Chairperson,

In February this year, Pakistan proudly hosted the Third Summit of the First Ladies of the Regional Steering Committee on Advancement of Rural and Island Women of the Asia Pacific Region (RSCAP), whose current Chairperson is Begum Sehba Musharraf, the First Lady of Pakistan. Thirteen countries attended the Summit. The Summit adopted a set of recommendations called the Islamabad Declaration, which will guide our actions for the next three years.

Madame Chairperson,

The themes selected for discussion and agreed conclusions this year, are relevant and timely. With regard to the “role of men and boys in gender equality”, I have the honour to invite all participating delegations to visit an exhibition of posters and paintings organized by the Ministry of Women Development of Pakistan and UNESCO Pakistan on this theme, in the lobby outside at 1300 hours today.

We are proud of what Pakistan has achieved in empowerment of women. We have struggled and progressed with whatever resources we could muster. I must reiterate that Pakistan by the Grace of God, under the leadership of President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali, is committed to remain a moderate and progressive Muslim state as envisioned by our founder Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

Finally, let us address a very important issue. Let us talk peace. If we can recognize that we can defend our borders and yet educate our children. If we can recognize that we can hear all voices and not lose our own. If we can think global and act local. At present, South Asia is experiencing a thaw. Two weeks ago, the Foreign Secretaries of Pakistan and India met in Islamabad. There have been exchanges of groups of artists, sportsmen, journalists, businessmen, politicians, etc. I think it is time for the women of Pakistan and India to take the lead. For if the men at some stage may refuse to get out of the past, then it is up to us, women to choose a future and I think we are ready for this task. We can bring a just and lasting peace to our region.

Let us dedicate this initiative of peace millions of toiling women of South Asia, who at this moment could be working in the fields - carrying bricks on their shoulders, climbing mountains with pitchers of water on their heads, little girls who could be cooking, washing dishes, or mopping floors, with their rag dolls and books, hidden away under in piles of dirty dishes and soiled linen. We also owe this initiative to our mothers, the most important women in the world.

I thank you Madame Chairperson.