

Statement by Mrs. Nilofar Bakhtiar, Advisor to the Prime Minister and Incharge, Ministry of Women Development on Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the Special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000:gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century" and Current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls at the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women on March 2, 2005

Madam Chairperson,

Allow me to extend, on behalf of Pakistan delegation, our warmest felicitations on your assumption of the Chairmanship of the Commission on the Status of Women. You will have Pakistan's full support in making the proceedings meaningful as well as fruitful during this significant high-level session. My delegation would like to associate with the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of G77 & China.

Madam Chair

Beijing was an inspiration. It was a breaking ground. We were not there as emissaries or government representatives ---- but were there as women –as women activists. And we came back charged and fuelled with a lot of new ideas and strength. Whatever we have been able to achieve in the last ten years, has become a part of our personalities and our souls. Thank you Beijing. Thank you United Nations. And thank you UNIFEM for keeping it alive.

After the conclusion of the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing, Pakistan prepared a National Plan of Action on the twelve areas of concern. A thirteenth area, on women with disabilities was added to the global agenda on women by us.

And now allow me to share the outcome of the process, something that has made all of us proud. Today we see 22 percent women in the country's Parliament including two federal ministers, five State ministers and seven provincial ministers, in addition to several chairpersons and secretaries of parliamentary committees. At the grass roots we have elected 40,000 women councilors, also as Mayors and Deputy Mayors. We have trained 27,000 of them through a woman's political participation project. In addition to this, 2000 women councilors have been facilitated to become computer literate. Recently, Women's Political Schools have been established in Pakistan, a globally unique experiment with the purpose of empowering women in public offices.

A National Commission on the Status of women was established in the country three years ago. The Commission is mandated to act as a watch dog and review all discriminatory laws.

Economic and Social empowerment of women is a major focus of the present Government. Massive micro credit programs are under way to fund income generation projects for women by The First Women Bank, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, Khushali Bank, Agricultural Development Bank and the NGO sector. The First Women Bank is unique also because it is run exclusively by women for women. The Ministry of Women Development is a major share holder in the Women's Bank. Besides, Women's business Chambers of Commerce have been set up and they are now being connected with display centers and business incubators in major cities.

Gender Budgeting is a relatively new concept for the world. We have taken a lead in accepting the challenge and feel proud to share that a separate chapter has been included in the poverty reduction strategy paper. 7 million US dollars have been allocated for the initial implementation of the project.

Madam Chair

Violence against women is a global concern. The Govt. has established ten Crisis Centers for women in distress along with shelter homes and a helpline service. Free of cost, medical, legal, and psycho social counseling services are available at these centers round the clock. Ten women police stations and several women police complaint cells are operational throughout the country.

Our biggest achievement in the last one decade, after women's political empowerment through the quota system is the passage of the law commonly known as Honour Killing Bill.

The Bill stipulates that the crime committed in the name of honour or on the pretext of honour will be considered as a pre-meditated murder and dealt with accordingly. A minimum penalty for honour crimes is 10 years. Maximum punishment is death or life imprisonment. The Law imposes severe punishments on violations of law in the name of honour and equally applies on incidents like hurt, attempted murder and murder.

A national committee on violence against women has been formed to monitor the implementation of this law and has registered 5000 volunteers including religious leaders to combat all forms of gender injustices. Pakistan is signatory to major human right treaties and conventions including CEDAW and CRC, ILO Convention 100 and SAARC Convention on Trafficking in Women.

GRAP, the Gender Reform Action Plan is a major stride aiming at a 10% quota for women in government jobs. It will also facilitate the formation of special cells in different Ministries to deal exclusively with gender issues. The Ministry for Women Development will be the focal point for overall coordination for GRAP.

For Beijing+ 10, we have had a national consultation, one by the NGOs facilitated by the Government and one by the Government itself. After a similar consultation process, the CEDAW report is ready and will be soon presented to the CEDAW Committee.

Pakistan will host two Conferences in the coming months. One on the MDGs and the other on Beijing + 10.

Madam Chairperson,

As I conclude, I would like to highlight that millions of pairs of eyes are looking up towards this forum- where do we go now- what next?

We, the women, should not only be a game of numbers. The role - the influence, the share must be ensured- the process must continue. My friends, our glory is not in never falling but in rising each time we fall. This time is our time- today is the only thing we can be sure of- right here right now- hold the moment in your hands. Yes, we can do it.

Madam Chairperson,

In terms of time span we all have covered a decade since we gathered at Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the Special session of the General Assembly

entitled 'Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century' expressed the resolve of the international community to establish a clear path towards the attainment of those goals for women who account for half the world population. As we commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, our real test is to review and evaluate the achievements we have made during this decade to develop and empower the women; socially, politically and economically in response to the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Madam Chairperson,

Translating the vision and commitment of the government into reality, in consonance with Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and National Plan of Action for Women, Pakistan has undertaken a number of substantive initiatives during the last ten years for women's social, political and economic empowerment.

- There are 2 women federal Ministers including myself with the designation of Advisor to Prime Minister for Women Development, 5 women Ministers of State and 3 women Ministers in provincial Cabinets.
- Nearly 20% women are elected in the Parliament on general and reserved seats and 33% seats are reserved for women at all tiers of local government.
- Women's Political Participation Project (W3P), one of the best practices in the region, successfully ran from 2002 to 2004 imparting training to 27000 women councilors.
- Women's Political Schools (WPS) have been established recently with the purpose of empowering women in public offices so that their issues and concerns are raised in the policy agenda and are addressed through public policy.
- National Commission on the Status of Women established.

At the social and economic front

- Micro-credit programmes have been launched to fund income generating projects of women by First Women Bank, Small and Medium Enterprises Bank, Khushhali Bank (Micro-finance Bank), Agriculture Development Bank and NGOs. Women Chambers of Commerce and Industry established.
- Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund was created for poor rural and urban communities, with specific emphasis on empowering women.
- Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) has been gender mainstreamed. Women Health Project 2000 – focuses on improving health, nutrition and social status of women and girls by developing women friendly health systems in 20 districts of Pakistan
- Crisis Centers for Women in Distress established to provide temporary shelter, free legal aid, medical relief and legal and psycho-social counseling services to women in distress.

Madam Chairperson,

On the front of eliminating discrimination and violence against women, Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2004 was enacted last year. It is

Besides, Pakistan has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), SAARC Convention on Trafficking in Women and ILO Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration between Men and Women. Control of Human Trafficking Ordinance was promulgated in November, 2001.

Madam Chairperson,

Today Pakistan is seen as a moderate, enlightened and progressive country in the international community. In recent years Pakistan's economy has gained visible strength. Amongst others, the larger allocations for social sector like education, health, labour etc is reflective of this strength. The efforts for women's development and empowerment have also been unprecedented. But the fact of the matter is that in many developing countries like Pakistan, the task for women's cause is so enormous that even unprecedented efforts prove to be a drop in the ocean. We are, thus, determined and committed to march continuously and relentlessly for an accelerated advancement of women. We face formidable challenges like other developing countries in full realization of the objectives of Beijing Conference. Some of these are associated with changing the social attitude towards promoting the gender agenda, globalization, resource constraints, gender mainstreaming of national developing process etc. We will, thus, have to go a long way for the achievement of the goals of Beijing Conference i.e. gender equality, development and peace.

I thank you Madam Chairperson.