



**Remarks by Foreign Minister of Pakistan, H.E. Bilawal Bhutto
Zardari, at the General Discussion of 67th Session of
Commission on the Status of Women**

**Theme: Innovation and technological change, and education in
the digital age for achieving gender equality and the
empowerment of all women and girls
(8 March 2023)**

**Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies, and
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honored to address the 67th session of the CSW. Pakistan attaches great importance to the Commission's work. We welcome this year's priority theme, and look forward to fruitful discussions at the session.

Excellencies,

My mother, Benazir Bhutto, represented Pakistan at the 4th Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and said that, "As the first woman ever elected to head an Islamic nation, I feel a special responsibility towards women's issues and towards all women. And as a Muslim woman, I feel a special responsibility to counter the propaganda of a handful that Islam gives women a second-class status."

Since then, it has been part of my political and personal mission to address such misconceptions about Islam and advance the cause of women empowerment that was so boldly espoused by my mother as a living example.

The Conference, convened on "Women in Islam" on 08th March in my capacity as Chair of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, was an effort in this direction.

I am most gratified by the wide participation, interest, and enriching exchange of views at the Conference. I look forward to building on these discussions in future as well.

Excellencies,

In today's digital age, equal access to and use of Internet and information communication technologies (ICTs) is a critical enabler of sustainable and inclusive development.

No State can afford to ignore this reality, lest at its own cost.

Yet the global digital landscape presents a sobering picture. The digital divide among and within countries continues to widen with one third of world population still offline.

The global South has been the most affected by this growing divide with uneven impact on women and girls. The economic and human rights cost of this disturbing fact is huge, as most recently evident during the COVID pandemic.

These challenges which Pakistan and other developing countries confront are function of poverty, underdevelopment and resources constraints. They are also reflective of the larger global disparities and inequalities.

At the same time, digital technologies provide us the most promising tools to uplift women and girls. This is unprecedented in human history. It is therefore upon us to harness the potential of these technologies in advancing this shared goal.

Distinguished participants,

The Government of Pakistan is fully committed to empowering women and girls through utilizing digital technologies.

Under the Digital Pakistan Policy Framework, we have particularly focused on this intersecting area under the umbrella of 'ICT for Girls'. Programmes have been launched across the country for training girls in computing skills so that they can have an opportunity to earn. We continue to incentivize women owned and women-run start-ups in Pakistan's IT sector. Computer labs have been established in girls' schools through collaboration with private sector.

We are proud of the fact that Pakistan has produced computer prodigy Arfa Karim, who is the world's youngest Microsoft Certificated Professional. To make this dream a reality for every girl and woman in Pakistan, we have established Arfa Karim Software and Technology Park in one of the country's biggest cities.

Additionally, the flagship initiative of Benazir Income Support Programme has mainstreamed financial and digital inclusion in our

governance structure while extending social safety-net to the underprivileged. I am very happy to note that 8 million women have been its primary beneficiaries.

As a result of these efforts, we are closing the gender digital gap in the country while harnessing ICTs to empower women and girls. We remain firm in our resolve to do more.

Excellencies,

We hope that the CSW session will come up with concrete recommendations to bridge the digital divide with special focus on women empowerment. In this connection, I put forward three points.

First, developed countries should extend all possible financial and technical support to developing countries with enhanced focus on technology transfer and infrastructure building. Such cooperation must remain a centerpiece of our collective efforts to build back better from the pandemic.

Second, discussions on digital divide and its gendered impacts must be situated in the wider context of global efforts to achieve 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs Summit being held later this year must galvanize transformative actions to promote women empowerment through ICTs use, with special focus on needs of the global South.

Lastly, being primarily responsible for protection and promotion of basic human rights, States should themselves undertake necessary steps to deploy digital technologies to empower women and girls. Investing in building digital skills and literacy among girls and women is the best investment in future.

Madam Chair,

The world cannot make progress by leaving behind half of its population. Let us pledge to empower women in this age of information and technological advancement as torchbearers of a peaceful, and prosperous future. Thank you!

**Closing Remarks by Foreign Minister of Pakistan H.E.
Bilawal Bhutto Zardari at the Conference on
Women in Islam: Understanding the Rights and Identity of
Women in the Islamic World
(8 March 2023)**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me at the outset thank you all for your active participation in this Conference. It has been an honour and a privilege for me to host this international Conference at the United Nations on International Women's Day which marks the historic occasion for millions of Muslim women.

We came together today to deliberate on ways to promote a better understanding of rights and identity of Muslim women in diverse cultural milieus and formulate strategies to ensure the full realization of their rights and aspirations. And not just that, but to celebrate the achievements of Muslim women who have been breaking new grounds in their respective fields. I am deeply inspired and heartened by the accomplishments of all our iconic women who are here today and their amazing journeys towards attainment of their dreams. Their inspiring stories, I am sure, will go a long way towards the empowerment of women and promotion and protection of their rights in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the participants, in particular the Head of Delegations for delivering statements in the High-Level Segment. I am thankful to iconic women for their enriched and fascinating discussion about their journeys towards breaking the glass ceiling. They are and will continue to serve as role models for millions of young women and girls around the world.

Excellencies,

It is important that the international community recognize that Muslim women in their societies are acting as agents of change. They are actively participating in the socio-economic development of their respective countries. More importantly, instead of being passive members of their societies, they are redefining and reshaping the role and identity of Muslim women. To overcome the perception and reality

gap, and the negative stereotyping, it is essential to create global awareness of the rights bestowed by Islam to women. Politicians, parliamentarians, policy makers, media, civil society and religious leaders can play a pivotal role in countering such negative perceptions even as they seek the full realization of the rights of Muslim women.

Excellencies,

Beyond the perception and reality gap, challenges to the empowerment of Muslim women and the enjoyment of their rights remain, both for Muslim and non-Muslim women. Some of these challenges flow from poverty, under-development and conflicts. We must make collective efforts to address these challenges towards the implementation of SDG 5 Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

First, we should reaffirm our support to the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly. The full and effective implementation of the OIC Action Plan for the Advancement of Women can be critical element in meeting our international obligations.

Second, to achieve SDG 3 & 4 adequate resources must be mobilized, equitably allocated and efficiently utilized. Financing is critical to overcoming the crisis in health and education, in particular to bridge the knowledge gap and the digital divide, and to harness the potential of technologies for all Muslim women and girls. Financial mobilization should include debt relief, concessional finance, Official Development Assistance and the redistribution of existing and new SDRs.

Third, international partners, including international organizations, international financial institutions and the private sector, should promote sustained gender-responsive, community-driven approaches for women's economic inclusion and participation, including support for social protection systems and assistance to Governments for gender-sensitive and gender-responsive budgeting.

Four, government representatives and policymakers need to review and reform laws that discriminate against women, including those that restrict their economic, social, cultural and political rights in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. This includes laws that restrict women's access to inheritance, property, and credit, as well as those that limit their ability to participate in the labor force. To create inclusive societies, it is essential to encourage women's economic empowerment through access to credit, financial services, and entrepreneurship opportunities. This can be achieved through policies that support women-owned businesses and provide incentives for the private sector to invest in women-led ventures.

Finally, ongoing conflicts, including situations of foreign occupation, are destroying the lives of millions of Muslim women and girls. OIC member states, with the cooperation of international community and international financial institutions, must also initiate programs to assist Muslim women and girls living in conflict zones or under foreign occupation, such as in Jammu and Kashmir and Palestine.

Excellencies,

Our loadstar should continue to be the empowerment, inclusion and participation of women in every sphere of life i.e social, political, legal, economic and cultural. Let us all work towards making this decade, the decade of gender equality.