

ITALY

Statement by
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Minister of Equal Opportunities

on the occasion of the 49rd session of the
Commission on the Status of Women

High-Level Plenary Meeting
New York, 1 March 2005

Madame Chairperson,

It is a great honour for me to take part in the current session of the CSW, on the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference, and to convey the greetings of Italy and of Italian women to all the countries of the world meeting in New York in these days.

I would first like to express the full and complete endorsement of Italy for the statement made by our Colleague from Luxemburg, on behalf of the twenty-five EU member countries. Luxemburg's voice is our voice, as are the priorities and commitments undertaken by Europe.

Italy's contribution to our meeting today is therefore meant to further enrich and explore the common, agreed positions of the European Union. We do so with the realization that, to address the broad, complex issues in the field, we need to hear a variety of voices and testimony, and to engage in a positive sharing of the experiences we have accrued over the past ten years and of the initiatives each of us has taken.

In 1995 the women of the world asked their Governments to make women's issues and equal opportunity targets in every area a primary objective in the drafting of national and international policies.

On the basis of that platform and of those demands for a profound renewal in the approach to these issues, a new political figure has emerged in some countries, including Italy, to take the lead role for this new commitment: I refer to the position of minister for equal opportunities.

This was Italy's first response to the strong commitment that the women of the world demanded from Beijing:

- A Ministry that has made the Beijing platform a long-term commitment at the highest level of political decision making, using it as its "Magna Carta";
- An autonomous Ministry, assigned to deal only with equal opportunity issues, which has been strengthened in Italy in the past four years thanks to the element of stability;
- A Ministry that has the power and the duty to indicate a scale of cross-cutting priorities involving every area of the public administration and to inform the government's actions at the national and international levels with the culture of Beijing.

On the domestic front, Italy has made significant progress in the area of empowerment. In our society, although women play a larger and more prominent role, the "glass ceiling" has remained intact, restraining women participation in local and national elective offices.

This is why, the Italian government modified the Constitution including the principle of equal opportunities in access to elective assemblies this will be implemented through the introduction of a quota system.

But Italy and Europe have equally important mission in the international community for two reasons: because it is up to the richer countries to make a concrete contribution to the developing countries; and because wherever the rights of women are stronger and more widespread, there is a greater chance of influencing international policy.

This implies first of all maximum respect for and resolute protection of diversity. In this framework of mutual enrichment and peaceful coexistence of different cultures, traditions and customs, Europe is invested with a responsibility to act to assure that the strong instruments at our disposal are placed at the service of the Beijing objectives and the

were minors, were rescued from slavery over a three-year period and given job placement in our country.

We offer it as a good practice and as an operative model that we submit to your attention.

We maintain that a greater commitment should be made to the fight against genital mutilation, a practice that violates the physical integrity of girls and can lead to serious health problems, particularly in the area of reproduction. In this respect, well-deserved applause should be given to the work done by UNFPA, UNIFEM and UNICEF.

Great progress has been made against female genital mutilation in recent international conferences, where a strong opposition to FGM has been voiced by the Governments where these practices are still widespread.

I think that this international commitment should be increased and enhanced because the physical integrity of women is not only a specific women's right but rather an inalienable right of all human beings.

Slavery and mutilation offend the conscience of every woman and of every person in the world. I hope that in ten years' time, at Beijing +20, we shall be able to speak of these evils in the past tense.

Thank you Madam Chairperson.