

**STATEMENT BY**

**THE HONOURABLE DATO' SERI SHAHRIZAT ABDUL JALIL  
MINISTER OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
MALAYSIA**

**ON**

**REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION AND  
THE OUTCOME DOCUMENTS OF THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF**

**AND**

**CURRENT CHALLENGES AND FORWARD-LOOKING STRATEGIES FOR  
THE ADVANCEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS**

**AT**

**THE 49<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF  
THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN  
UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK**

Madam Chairperson,

1. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action endorsed by the world leaders at the Fourth World Conference in 1995 held a promise to women across the globe that their rights will be protected and that barriers to their equal participation and full involvement in the development process to achieve gender equality, development and peace, will be removed. Malaysia has made good on that promise. In fact, the political will of the Malaysian Government to enhance the status of women and to protect their rights has never wavered since the Declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1979. Today, Malaysia would like to reiterate its commitment and will continue to take all necessary measures to fulfil its obligations to empower its women. And recognizing the importance of this meeting to us and to women worldwide, Malaysia has in its delegation 27 delegates comprising federal and state representatives, representatives from the academia, professional institutions, NGOs and the private sector.

2. Malaysia is fully aware of the potential women possess. To further enhance and realise such potential and in recognition of their contributions to the development of our community and country, Malaysia has established the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. One of the key agencies under the Ministry is the Department of Women's Development, with its fifteen offices Equality comprising Cabin  
Recently, the Cabinet established a Committee on Gender  
gender focal points in their respective Ministries. These institutional arrangements will provide greater impetus as well as the infrastructure for mainstreaming women's interests throughout Malaysia's entire development process.

Madam Chair,

3. Malaysia regards the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Millennium Development Goals as inextricably linked, and their principles and goals compatible with our national agenda towards ensuring the promotion and fulfilment of women's rights and fundamental freedoms. Due to the far-sighted vision of our leaders, coupled with strong political will and support from the society, irrespective of race or religion, Malaysia is well on her way to make good on its obligations through numerous policy measures and programmes, some of which I would like to share with you in brief.

4. In the legal domain, Malaysian legislation are constantly reviewed and where necessary amended to ensure that women are not discriminated against. A major achievement is the inclusion of the principle of non-discrimination as enshrined in CEDAW into our Federal Constitution, when an amendment was made to Article 8 (2), which now states that no discrimination should be made, among others, on the grounds of gender. Following such amendment, all subsidiary legislation are being reviewed to ensure their adherence to the Constitution. Other developments include:

amendments to the Income Tax Act to allow wives to elect for separate assessment of their income for tax purposes;

- ii. amendments to the Penal Code to increase the penalties for rape and other sexual offences;
- iii. amendments to the Pension Act which now allows widows to continue to receive pensions even after they have remarried;
- iv. amendments to the Guardian of Infants Act to give full parental rights to mothers;
- v. the repeal of immigration regulations which discriminate against Malaysian women who are married to foreigners; and
- vi. the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act to provide protection for battered wives and other victims of domestic violence.

5. To create greater awareness of gender issues within the society, the Government, in collaboration with NGOs, has embarked on a comprehensive gender sensitisation programme which includes a legal literacy programme to educate women of their rights; sensitising policy makers, planners and implementers of the

information system, and the mainstreaming of gender perspective into national development plans and policies, including into the budgeting processes through a pilot project on Gender Budget Analysis. To bridge the digital divide between men and women, efforts have been made to improve women's access to information and communications technology (ICT), both in urban and rural areas.

Madam Chair,

6. Malaysia has achieved almost all the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including and in particular MDG 3, i.e. to promote gender equality and empower women. As indicated in Malaysia's report on *The Implementation of the MDGs, Its Success and Challenges*, launched by the Honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur recently, women in Malaysia have achieved great success in almost every sector. Female life expectancy has continued to improve, from 74.2 years in 1995 to 75.5 years in 2003, and the maternal mortality rate has remained low, i.e. 0.3 per 1,000 live births. Women's literacy rate is now almost 100 per cent, and their enrolment at the tertiary level comprises more than 50 per cent of total enrolment. At the workplace, women have managed to break the proverbial glass ceiling. Many hold high-ranking positions within the Government, including as Cabinet Ministers, Chief Justice, Governor of the Central Bank, Solicitor-General, and Sessions Court Judges. Women are also making great inroads in the corporate arena. With greater commitment shown by the Government and other relevant stakeholders, we are confident that the target of 30 per cent participation of women in decision-making processes will be achieved.

Madam Chair,

7. As a multi-racial and multi-religious society, Malaysia has proven that the differences in culture, religion and belief do not detract from the advancement of women. Malaysia has learnt how to share the values of tolerance and freedom. Our heterogeneous society, with all its attributes of diversity, is a source of our strength, not a cause for division and confrontation. We are aware of the fact that many cultural and other social factors operate insidiously to disadvantage women in the whole gamut of power, but I would like to state with confidence that as a country with a Muslim majority, Malaysia has proven to the world that the progressive Islam that we embrace does not discriminate against women. Rather, it values the contributions of women, and views their advancement as being of paramount importance to the development of any country. Malaysia cannot afford to waste the potential of half of its nation, let alone to leave them to remain marginalized.

8. In facing the new and emerging challenges of globalisation and in achieving sustainable development, women's potential should be harnessed to enable them to compete on an equal footing with men, and to further contribute to the socio-economic development of the country. In this regard, Malaysia will continue to strengthen its education system, the most important vehicle for development, in order to produce a more knowledgeable, reliable, creative, innovative, energetic,

Madam Chair,

9. Malaysia is appreciative of all the efforts of the United Nations to advance the status of women. We strongly believe in multilateralism and in collective responsibility. We are of the view that in the era of globalisation and liberalisation, the international community should spare no effort in creating an enabling environment conducive to the empowerment of women, so that they can keep pace with new and emerging challenges. In this regard, while Malaysia takes pride in its present achievements, it is dismayed by the situation of millions of women and children around the globe, who live in unacceptable conditions due to wars and armed conflicts. Numerous reports on recent events make for a chilling read. In war-torn countries, many women and children have been raped, tortured, maimed and subjected to other unspeakable crimes, including crimes against humanity. In this regard, we concur fully with the Secretary-General, who stated that *"while the United Nations may not be able to take humanity to heaven, it must act to save humanity from hell"*. Clearly, concrete measures and urgent actions by the international community are needed to halt the current violence against women and children and to restore their security and dignity. My delegation would like to reiterate that humanity's vision for peace and development cannot be achieved unless women's rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled on an equal basis with men.

Madam Chair,

10. The tsunami that recently swept across the Indian Ocean left many people devastated, in trauma and agony, especially women and children. I had the opportunity to accompany the Honourable Prime Minister of Malaysia to Banda Aceh, and had personally witnessed the devastating effect of the tsunami. We would like to put on record that our hearts go out to the grieving families of victims and people of Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and India, and people in other affected countries on the demise of their loved ones and on the fate of countless others who are unaccounted for. While the tsunami may have made no distinction between men and women in relation to loss of life and its tragic aftermath, it has produced some gendered implications, ranging from the intensification of women's traditional role in caring for the sick to increased cases of rape and abuse. In this regard, we strongly support the suggestion by the FAO on the need to raise awareness on gender aspects of the issues. And, fully convinced that rehabilitation and development interventions cannot be fully effective without the involvement of women, it is important to have more women participating in the policy and decision-making processes to ensure that both women's and men's different needs and concerns are reflected in policies, practices and resources through the phases of relief, rehabilitation and development.

I wish the deliberations of the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW full success.