



EGYPT

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STATEMENT

49TH SESSION

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

BY

H.E. MINISTER DR. FARKHONDA HASSAN
SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR WOMEN

HIGH LEVEL PLENARY MEETING
(BEIJING + 10)

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PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Madame Chairperson,

Excellencies,

We are gathered today, 10 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action represent the main foundation on which national, regional and international efforts to empower women and identify relevant policies have been based.

First, my delegation would like to associate itself with the statement made by Jamaica's statement on behalf of the G 77 and China. I would also like to congratulate Ms. Kyung-Wha Kang on her continued chairmanship of the Committee on the Status of Women and confirm my delegation's commitment to cooperate with her in order to ensure the success of the current session.

In addition I would like to stress Egypt's total commitment to support all efforts made for the advancement of women, their protection and enhancing their capacities for effective participation in all political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Egypt believes that the advancement of women is one of the main pillars for society's development, and ensuring its advancement, hence the importance of including women in Egypt's development plans and projects as a national strategic and political given.

Madame Chairperson,

A remarkable improvement has been observed in the status of Egyptian women. They appear to have been acquiring new traits as a result of their increased access to education and employment. Today's young generation of women have boundless aspirations and compete with their male peers in all areas of education and at all levels. There is a significant increase in the number of women occupying high managerial posts, and other decision making positions during the past ten years to reach three times what they were in 1995, such as the posts of university presidents, judges, cabinet ministers, deputy ministers and chairs of city councils, etc.

Perhaps Egypt's most significant achievement during the past ten years after Beijing is the establishment of the National Council for Women in 2000 as an independent constitutional government institution, directly under the President of the Republic, which confirms Egypt's commitment and political will to empower women.

The National Council for Women aims at supporting women's economic and social status and ensuring their effective participation in all spheres of development. The Council also has the right to review all legislation before their presentation before Parliament to ensure their gender equality that is stated in the Constitution.

Since its establishment five years ago, the National Council for Women has taken great steps towards the advancement of women. The NCW succeeded in mainstreaming women's concerns in the five-year Socio-Economic National Development Plan (2002-2007). For the first time in Egypt, NCW developed gender-

sensitive indicators to monitor the implementation of the plan, and methodologies for gender auditing of national budgets so that the funding addressed towards women's issues increase to more than twice its value in the previous national plan.

In addition NCW has developed a gender-sensitive strategy, to be integrated into the National Strategic Plan for the Achievements of the Millennium Development Goals. The strategy included an ambitious action plan, guided by the identified areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. I would like to indicate the transparency under which the Council performs utilizing the concept of results-based management. Therefore continuous efforts are made to monitor and evaluate results on an annual basis in all ministries and government institutions.

The National Council for Women's special position, directly affiliate to the President, allows it to be an agent of change in the governmental institutions management making them more gender sensitive. This is accomplished through the cooperation between the Council and governmental , non-governmental and private-sector institutions using Cooperation Protocols in various fields.

Equal Opportunity Units have been established in ministries under the direct authority of the Minister to ensure that women receive their constitutional rights and not to suffer discriminatory practices in the work place.

Furthermore, an Ombudsman Office was established at the National Council for Women to receive complaints from women with regard to gender discrimination. The office has installed 3 toll-free hotlines and appointed lawyers that deal with gender discrimination at the work place, personal status law, domestic violence. This effort resulted in the amendment to the personal status law to enable women for the first time, to divorce themselves in court, even if they cannot prove harm, which is a right given to Muslim women be Islam, yet society and tradition have denied her that rights for 14 centuries.

The Nationality Law was amended in 2004 t allow Egyptian women to bestow their nationality upon their children if they were married to non-Egyptians. Family Courts were also established in 2004, ending a bitter phase in Egyptian women's lives seeking divorce.

A new law was passed for the creation of a Family Insurance Fund, aiming, inter alia, at advancing the alimony to women until personal status cases are resolved and judgments enforced.

Due to its unconstitutional nature, Ministerial decree no. 3936 of 1996, that stipulated that the wife should obtain her husband's prior approval for the issuance of a passport and as a condition to travel abroad, was abolished.

Only last week, we have also succeeded in changing the Tax Law to make it more gender sensitive.

Yesterday the Egyptian Parliament agreed to the increase in the age of children's custody to 15 years of age.

As the institution responsible for the advancement of women, the National Council for Women implements several programmes such as Women's Economic

Empowerment Programme, which includes a center for development of small projects as a promising means for women's economic empowerment that does not conflict with women's responsibilities inside and outside the home.

In terms of economic empowerment, special attention has been given to female-heads of households. In addition, the Government of Egypt has been keen on engendering the macroeconomic policies and structural reforms that it has been recently undertaken. It has also taken into consideration the gender dimension and the possible adverse consequences on the vulnerable groups mainly women, especially that we are witnessing a period of economic integration and globalization.

The National Council for Women has established a center for the Political Empowerment of Women, as a pilot initiative that provides intensive training programmes. NCW in collaboration with several NGOs are exerting great efforts to increase the number of women candidates in the upcoming elections of the two Houses of Parliament and also in the Local Councils. Despite the fact that a woman has been elected as Deputy Speaker of the First House of the Parliament, and two women are chairs of Parliamentary committees, yet the number of female parliamentarians is very low.

With regards to education, the gender-gap has almost disappeared in basic and university levels. In some faculties, such as the Faculty of Dentistry, female enrollment is higher than that of males. Nonetheless, illiteracy is still an obstacle to women's advancement in rural areas.

Women's representation in decision-making positions in government institutions has increased to three times its value since the Beijing Conference.

Child and maternal mortality has declined significantly, reaching internationally acceptable levels.

I would like to conclude my address with a reference to a field in which the Egyptian woman plays a significant role, which is women and peace. Although Egypt has initiated peace in the region since 1977, these efforts have continued to this day, culminated in the Sharm El Sheikh Summit that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak called for last month. Peace efforts are not restricted to governmental efforts only but there are also non-governmental efforts being made, such as "Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak's International Women for Peace Movement", which is an example of the congregation of efforts to achieve peace, not only in the region, but all over the world.

Thank you Madame Chairperson.