

Bangladesh

Please check against delivery

Intervention by the Hon'ble State Minister for Women and Children Affairs

H.E. Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP

At the 56<sup>th</sup> Session of the CSW

29 February 2012

10.00 am-1.00 pm

Venue: Conference Room 4

Mr. Chair:

I am greatly honored to be here taking part in the General Discussion and presenting the Country Statement of Bangladesh. The journey of women empowerment in Bangladesh began with its independence in 1971, when the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman initiated policies and measures to empower women, which found its due place in the Bangladesh Constitution in 1972, guaranteeing women equal rights with men in all spheres of state and public life. Under the visionary leadership of Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the government has undertaken various programs and projects for holistic empowerment of women by mainstreaming gender concern in overall development process. National Women Development Policy, 2011 has been declared by the Government. Economic empowerment of women is a high priority agenda of the government. It is strongly emphasized that features of women's poverty require a gender perspective in pro-poor growth strategy. Women are active agents of economic and social transformation reduction of feminization of poverty poses a critical challenge. Echoing the theme of Millennium Development Summit, "Investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustainable economic growth, Social Safety Net Protection Scheme has been expanded placing rural women at the center. Social safety net protection for extreme poor women is an essential measure aimed at reducing feminization of poverty. Under the social safety net protection –

- Widow and destitute women allowance is paid to 920,000 women in rural areas.
- Maternity allowance is paid to 88 thousand pregnant women in rural areas.
- In order to ensure food security Vulnerable Group Development Program provides 30KG rice to each extreme poor women in rural areas. The number of beneficiary is 750,000 poor women in rural areas throughout the country.
- Lactating mother allowance for working women in urban areas is paid to 67,500 mothers. About 10,000 women working in private sector garments industries also avail this safety net protection from the government.
- There is old age allowance for elderly women.
- Under VGDUP Program 80,000 poor women in 36 sub-districts of 8 districts have been given income generating skill training with subsistence allowance and productive asset like sewing machine, cattle etc. worth TK 7,000.

Comprehensive initiatives have been undertaken to ensure skill development of women by providing extensive training in different sectors like agriculture, sewing, block-batik, handicraft, beautification, catering, computer literacy etc.

Emphasis has been given on educating women and girls. Bangladesh has achieved gender parity in enrollment in primary education. In secondary education girls exceed boys. Stipend program for girls enhanced their enrollment. Positive indicators of women's advancement are reflected in the continuing parity in school enrolment, reduced infant and maternal mortality. Health care services are being delivered through 11,000 community clinics in rural areas with each serving 6,000 thousand people including vulnerable women. Maternal mortality rate has decreased to 194 per 100,000 live births. Maternity Leave has been extended to six months with pay for government employees. The UN Millennium Award 2010 was a testament to the success in reducing infant mortality. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been awarded the South South Award for use of technology in providing health care service to poor women in remote rural areas.

Progress in women's political participation has been significant. The Honorable Prime Minister, Lleader of the Opposition, Deputy Leader of Parliament, Whip, 6 members of the cabinet, Chairperson and Member of Standing Committees in the Parliament are women. In the local government for the first time in 1998, women were elected as members of Union Councils to 12,828 reserved seats. There is also one elected Women Vice-chairman at every sub-district. In the bureaucracy there is a 10 percent quota for women. There are women judges in the High Court Division and Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. Women are serving in Police, Army, Navy and Air Force. There is an All Female Formed Police Unit (FPU) serving in UN Peace-keeping Mission in Haiti.

Women entrepreneurs at the grass root level in rural villages have been given access to financial support by way of collateral free loan up to Tk. 25 Lac under Refinancing Scheme. In order to facilitate market access for them the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has for the first time established a sales center run at the cost of the government in the capital city Dhaka under the name "Joyeeta" - Winner Women, from where the women entrepreneurs are directly selling their products.

Measures adopted to combat violence against women include One Stop Crisis Centers in 7 Divisions of the country providing medical treatment, legal support, policy assistance and rehabilitation to women victims of violence. National Trauma Counseling Center has been established providing psycho-social counseling to women victims of violence. Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 has been

passed by the Parliament. Gender responsive budgeting is in place. National Counsel for Women and Children (NCWCD) is the highest forum, with Hon'ble Prime Minister as Chair, for monitoring and ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women.

I would like to conclude with the words of Nobel Laureate Economist Amartya Sen, "Women are not passive recipients of welfare-enhancing help brought about by society; but are active promoters and facilitators of social transformations. Such transformations influence not only the lives and well being of women, but those of women and children." Let us all therefore join hands to attain gender equality and women empowerment through our concerted efforts for sustainable, inclusive and equitable development. It is only through securing women's equal place with men that we can achieve our desired aspiration of a peaceful world.

Thank you.