



PAKISTAN

PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement

by

H.E. Ms. Fiza Batool Gilani

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Head of Delegation of Pakistan

at the

56th Session of

the Commission on the Status of Women

New York

29 February 2012

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

Pakistan congratulates the Chairperson and the entire bureau on their election and for preparing a comprehensive organization of work for this session. The topics and issues identified for this year's session are crucial for the promotion and protection of women's rights around the world. Discussions in this session would help us better understand these issues and guide the way forward.

2. We would also like to put on record our appreciation for the UN Women. Under the able leadership of Madam Bachelet, it has taken off on a sound basis.

Madam Chairperson,

3. Our national vision for women empowerment is guided by the words of our founding father, the Quaid-e-Azam, who said that no nation could ever be worthy of its existence that could not take its women along with the men and no struggle could ever succeed without women participating side by side with men.

4. The constitution of Pakistan guarantees equal rights for all its citizens without discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, sex, race or religion. In order to ensure empowerment of women, the government of Pakistan has taken steps to promote women rights in, political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Concrete steps have been taken to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Today, women in Pakistan proudly participate in every field of life; from agriculture to industry, business to armed forces and from legislation to policy making.

5. Pakistan not only had the honour of having the first ever woman Prime Minister of the Muslim world but also has the distinction of having first ever woman Speaker of the National Assembly in the entire Muslim World. Women, now, comprise 22.2 percent of the National Assembly and 17 percent in the Senate. An active Women Caucus of 90 women parliamentarians with representation of all parties has been formed at the national level.

6. Our commitment to addressing women issues is evident from a range of legislative and administrative measures in particular the recent legislations against acid crimes, anti-women practices, harassment of women at workplace, and domestic violence. The Parliament has recently passed the National Commission on the Status of Women Bill 2012 providing for complete financial and administrative autonomy. An office of the Ombudsperson for Protection of Women against Harassment at Workplace has also been established.

Madam Chairperson,

7. In recognition of rural women's contribution, the Prime Minister of Pakistan in 2010 declared the International Women's day as the National Rural Women's day.

8. Economic empowerment projects are part of the government's efforts to create income-generating activities for marginalized women. The Benazir Income Support Program, the largest ever program of social protection providing direct financial support to the women of poor households is the bedrock of such initiatives. It also provides for skills for employability, access to health and insurance cover, access to education and provision of non-interest based loans for women entrepreneurship. Seven million poor families across the country would benefit from this programme.

9. In the last three years over twelve million women have been given computerized National Identity Cards under this programme, 70% of whom are from rural areas, which help them access multiple services. Under yet another initiative, the government has distributed land to landless farmers, 70% of whom are again women.

Madam Chairperson,

10. Despite these efforts, gender inequality remains a big challenge to socio-economic development in Pakistan. Rural women engage in agriculture, livestock management and domestic chores as unpaid and unregistered workers. Female literacy rate is low, that is 45%. Urban female literacy rate is 70% and in rural areas it is 40%.

11. In the face of these challenges, Pakistan is guided by the words of its former Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto who stated that a woman who cannot plan her life, family or a career is fundamentally not free. We are, therefore, committed to changing the plight of women in Pakistan by harnessing their potential to the gigantic task of nation building.

12. With only three years left to 2015, we are also aware of the need to expedite efforts on the gender dimensions of the MDGs to ensure their timely implementation. In this regard, sustained international cooperation and global partnerships are of vital importance.

13. In conclusion, Chairperson, we would like to put on record that as a member of the Executive Board of UN Women, Pakistan has worked constructively towards shaping its Strategic Plan, which we hope would be able to make the desired impact in the lives of women around the world. We would continue to extend our full support to help UN Women realize its aims and objectives.

Thank you