



SRI LANKA

Statement

by

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On the occasion of the

**57th Session of the
Commission on the Status of Women**

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(Please check against delivery)

Thank you Madam Chair,

Let me join other speakers to congratulate you and the Members of the Bureau on your election to the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The delegation of Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by Fiji on behalf of the G77 and China.

While we celebrate the many accomplishments of women, we are also constantly reminded of the pervasive reality of gender based violence. Its prevalence is universal. The theme of the fifty-seventh session of the CSW - "Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls" – is therefore timely.

Madam Chair,

Sri Lanka's women have been politically empowered since 1931 - enjoying universal adult suffrage. It was therefore not so surprising for Sri Lanka to have produced the first democratically elected woman Prime Minister in the world in 1960.

Sri Lanka has, historically, recognized that civil and political rights are interlinked with social, cultural and economic rights. Therefore, our macro policies have ensured transformational change in the lives of its women. With Constitutional guarantees for gender equality, Sri Lanka exploited synergistic interactions of health care with basic education, improved water and sanitation, malaria control, and integrated rural development - including building rural roads. The adult literacy rate in Sri Lanka for females is 97%. Among youth (15-24 years) the literacy rate is 99%. According to the latest statistics, women enjoy a longer life expectancy (80 years) than men (76 years). The contribution of women, especially rural women, in facilitating Sri Lanka's successful achievement of most of the Millennium Development Goals is significant. Traditional knowledge of mothers on maternal health coupled with their high levels of education has contributed significantly to reducing the child mortality rate (8.9 per thousand) and the maternal mortality rate (39 per 100,000 live births).

Women also comprise the majority in the medical, teaching and the nursing professions, serving in the rural schools and hospitals. Rural women's functional literacy and numeracy skills have also enabled them to avail fully of the financial services including micro-credit facilities which are heavily concentrated in the rural sector. The government provides tangible incentives for private investors to

establish enterprises, including industrial ventures, ICT outsourcing facilities and tourism related businesses away from the main cities to enable educated rural men and women to access such opportunities from their homes.

Madam Chair,

The Government of Sri Lanka has been expanding the legal framework to create gender sensitive laws, set up institutional mechanisms and is seeking to bridge the implementation gaps to deal with the area of domestic violence. My delegation is heartened to note that the Secretary-General's two reports on this theme give due recognition to a range of measures adopted by Sri Lanka under the three pillars of the global framework to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls.

Sri Lanka enacted the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act No. 34 of 2005 (PDVA), to strengthen the protection mechanisms. The National Action Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights further consolidates the policy framework with its strong focus on violence against women, women and the criminal justice system, female migrant workers and trafficking in women and children is evident. Gender focal points have been established in every Government Ministry to ensure a gender perspective in the implementation of national programmes. Women and Child Development Units have been designed for all 25 Districts in the country. These Units consist of a Child Rights Promotion Officer (CRPO), Women's Development Officer (WDO), Early Childhood Development Officer (ECCD), Relief Sister, Counseling Assistant and a Psychosocial Assistant.

Madam Chair,

We also recognize that new laws will have little impact without capacity building and systems and structures to support implementation. The Institute of Judges Services and the Police Department of Sri Lanka have been conducting training and sensitization programmes for law enforcement officials. Adopting a multi-sectoral approach, training on prevention and management of gender based violence is also provided for Police Health Midwives and Primary Health Care Workers comprising the first health service providers to women and families. The Ministry of Health in partnership with non-government agencies have developed hospital-based centres to provide medical assistance to those requiring attention for injuries suffered before referral to legal and psychosocial support.

The paucity of temporary shelters or safe houses is an implementation gap that is being addressed even though the Department of Probation and Child Care provides temporary housing to victims of child abuse. The first Government sponsored shelter for women victims of violence has been set up to operationalize the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act. Plans are underway to establish the second

shelter in Mullaitivu, in the North. The Ministry of Justice in collaboration with the International Organization on Migration has set up a shelter for victims of trafficking. A Task Force has also been set up to formulate policies to further address trafficking in women and children.

Madam Chair,

In addition to the institutional framework at the macro level to address gender based violence, much needs to be accomplished at the level of the family and the community to address the socio-cultural causes of such violence. A country wide Campaign to End Violence against Women (CEVAW) was launched in 2004 and the outcomes are continuously monitored and evaluated by the National Committee on Women to strengthen the implementation of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act. Workshops are continuously held for grass roots level Women's Societies to sensitize them to the provisions of the Act, including incest, trafficking in women and girls, teenage pregnancies and under age marriages. In a pioneering effort, to sensitize men to gender-related violence, the Ministry of Child Development and Women Affairs in partnership with male Parliamentarians and the military has conducted two workshops under the banner, "*Men too can make a difference*".

Madam Chair,

In our post-conflict experience, Sri Lanka is particularly sensitive to the protection of war affected women and children. Every effort is being made to ensure that their lives are returned to normalcy, as far as possible, and as speedily as possible. While the Government in collaboration with bilateral assistance continues to address the socio-economic needs of war widows, we are also implementing measures to prevent and address issues of sexual abuse and related violence. The Government has established Women and Children's Police Desks staffed with female police officers in police stations in the North and the East. Specially trained police officers function at such desks which provide an enabling and protective environment for children, women and girls and their parents to report incidents of abuse and exploitation. This network is also linked to the National Child Protection Authority. Sexual and gender – based violence help desks are located in hospitals in the Districts affected by the conflict. The Sri Lankan military continues to undergo human rights training with the assistance of the ICRC. Workshops have also been held for military personnel to sensitize them to Security Council resolution 1325, including rights of women. A local NGO called the Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action and Association of War Affected Women educates soldiers, youth, and community leaders about international standards of war and promotes the economic and social development of women across former conflict lines.

Madam Chair,

We are hopeful that Sri Lanka's proactive efforts at the legal and policy implementation levels complemented by multi-sectoral services and responses will converge to dramatically reduce the incidence of gender based violence. We will also invest greater efforts and resources in identifying the underlying causes of gender based violence and addressing the causal factors. Sri Lanka is also aware of its international obligations having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and become party to the Optional Protocol in 2002.

With our focus also on the post 2015 Development Agenda, we welcome the theme of the 58th session, "Challenges and achievements in implementing the MDGS for women and girls." We also hope that the normative role spearheaded by the CSW and operational activities of UN Women will continue to expand the social, political, economic and cultural space for achieving gender equality across nations and societies.

I thank you, Madam Chair.