

Madam Chair,

Ten years have passed since the last international Women's conference in Beijing. We all remember the impressive momentum that it created. What have we achieved since then? A lot, however not enough. Our meeting must lead to a renewal of our commitment to gender equality, which is the driving force behind sustainable development and peace.

Switzerland reiterates its full support for the Declaration and Programme for Action adopted at Beijing and for the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly. These texts, like those of Cairo and of the follow-up conferences, clearly confirm that the rights of women are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Nevertheless, women continue to suffer disproportionately from extreme poverty. They account for three quarters of the illiterate population and are increasingly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. They are subjected to many forms of violence. These facts are shocking. We must redouble our efforts, notably in areas that are still neglected, such as to sexual health and reproductive rights. The consistent implementation of the Cairo and Beijing programmes for action is the essential prerequisite for achieving the goals set out in the Millennium Summit.

Together with international organisations and civil society, Switzerland is determined to achieve these goals. Gender equality is a subject that is at the heart of Switzerland's development cooperation aid. It focuses in particular on women's access to resources and on their situation in the economy. The year of micro-finance has underlined the role of women, and Switzerland is supporting numerous projects in this area. Macro-economic policies play a key role, as highlighted by the regional preparatory meeting in Geneva. The challenge in the coming years is to reduce economic disparities, which tends to give ground to discrimination and human trafficking.

Switzerland has placed the fight against violence against women and trafficking of women and girls at the centre of its commitment. On our initiative, 20 women foreign ministers and government representatives met in 2004 to study the possibilities of

joint action. In the framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Switzerland supports several projects to combat human trafficking and to rehabilitate victims. In accordance with Security Council Resolution 1325, my country supports projects and organisations abroad which protect women in conflict situations and promotes greater participation by women in peace processes.

Madam Chair,

I also would like to review some of the achievements in the area of gender equality at the national level. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in our Constitution. Since 1995, our policy has been to ensure the specific implementation of this principle. Recognition of educational and care-giving aspects in our pension system, measures to increase the number of women in higher education and in professional positions, de-criminalisation of abortion and an HIV/AIDS prevention policy based on the specific needs of young women and men are just a few examples. Measures to reconcile professional and family life are now our priority. This is an imperative from the gender equality and economic perspectives.

I would like to conclude by mentioning the progress we have made in combating domestic violence. Swiss criminal law has since 2004 permitted the courts to automatically prosecute domestic violence, without the need for a formal complaint to be lodged. The cantons have passed legislation which makes it possible to remove violent persons from home. Perpetrators and victims can obtain professional advice.

Madam Chair,

Although we have not yet achieved all our goals, I remain optimistic. We have everything to gain from a real partnership between men and women. Let us find practical and effective means of bringing this about.

Finally, I hope that our discussions will prove fruitful. Switzerland is pleased to be contributing to the debate, and I can assure you of its full support for the adoption of an unequivocal declaration which will send a clear message to the General Assembly this autumn.

Thank you for your attention.