

**STATEMENT BY YOLANDA FERRER GOMEZ,
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WOMEN
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TO THE 49 SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN.**

Madam Chairperson,

Allow me, jointly with my country's delegation support to the statement made by the Representative of Jamaica, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, to welcome this new meeting with the hope it will contribute to bring together new efforts for the advancement of women, in the midst of the adverse circumstances imposed by the serious and increasing danger that the current international situation entails.

The outcomes of the current session of this Commission shall necessarily favor a more real and deeper awareness of the great gap that exists nowadays between the purposes and goals agreed on within the adopted Declaration and Platform for Action and the current situation of women in all the regions of the world.

Since the very first Conference in Mexico up to the moment we speak, an atmosphere of greater knowledge and understanding has been created on the causes and effects of social inequality and women's discrimination; gender issues, including sexual and reproductive rights have been submitted to the public agendas of governments, political parties, social movements and a legal framework has been constituted in many countries, with the creation of mechanisms, plans and programmes that favor a greater prominence and advancement of women.

Nevertheless, within the current and unjust economic order, the situation of women has been aggravated on account of the disastrous effects of the neoliberal policies imposed by the major centers of economic, political and military power.

It may be affirmed today that not only the feminization of poverty prevails, but the feminization of social exclusion. The negative consequences of structural adjustment programmes, transnational investments and privatizations, the weakening of the State's role, sovereignty and independence restrictions, mediatic and cultural penetration, among other factors have tragically fallen on women.

Mankind observes with concern the most enormous social contrasts and the most irrational genocidal acts, wars, extreme expressions of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations which have seriously jeopardized the mere existence of the planet and its inhabitants: death of women, girls and boys, the elderly, innocent victims and savage tortures to human beings. How many offended women! How much devastation and many ruins, traditions and cultures walked all over! The overbearing and threatening danger that war expands to the so-called "*dark corners of the planets*", adds up to this.

Inequalities intensify injustice and poverty: inequalities in the distribution of wealth and consumption, unreachable distances between technological advances and arrears, between development and underdevelopment, the enormous frictions between rich and poor countries, between rich and poor people. Hunger, poverty, cultural and technological illiteracy, AIDS, drugs, war victims, orphans, insecurity and skepticism constitute the scourges of modernity which strike our poor countries' populations of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

In this context, the reality of women is dramatic, as regards poverty and the rest of the current world's social ills, not only due to the quantitative increase of the poor and the female proportion, estimated as 60% of the two thirds of the world population, but also because of the implications of being poor and a women in our societies: underconsumption, deficient nutritional condition prone to diseases resulting from this condition, lack of resources, less available educational and job opportunities, access to unsteady and badly-paid jobs, responsibility of double and even triple shift, reduced participation in social and family-related decision making, limited personal autonomy and inequalities causing accumulation of disadvantages for women.

At the same time, this first quinquennium is also the framework of resounding failures and irrefutable proofs of the neoliberal model's unfeasibility. The facts described and many others testify so, constituting signals of the collapse of an alternative presented as a possible salvation and which has turned out to be the most unjust, interfering and inhumane model which has already been universally rejected.

Economic and political pressures, bribery, blackmailing, threats as the resource of habitual methods to impose their hegemonic intentions, have not been able to prevent the metropolis from concealing the existence of symptoms which mark the beginning of a collapse.

Those are the unfavorable and constantly increasing international conditions marking the decade, characterized in Third World countries by higher economic dependence, limited sovereignty and greater external vulnerability, especially affected by the unjust economic order in force and the unequal terms for exchange, trade and collaboration.

Cuban women have followed in the last decade an upward path of economic, political, cultural and social participation.

Four main indicators would be enough to illustrate such statement. Women have been a population sector with priority within the employment programmes, where they represent 45% of all workers, 66.2% among technicians and professionals and 51% of all workers in the Science and Technological Innovation System.

When we attended the First World Conference in Mexico, it was our honor to state that the female work force had grown three times as compared to that of 1959. Nowadays, although the Cuban population has doubled in relation to that same date, the number of women workers has increased 7 times more to employ more than a million and a half women. The real tendency is that of the feminization of the high-qualification force and the increase in the work force and in the political and administrative policy of the country.

Women constitute 35.4% of Cuban leaders. In the Cuban Parliament, 35.9% of its representatives are women.

Women have priority in all governmental programmes. As to educational policy, equality of opportunities is guaranteed for free access to education, where women constitute half of the enrollment at all levels.

Within the new educational programmes aimed at the young population, which for several reasons were dissociated from the National Educational System, female enrollment has increased to 63%, approximately 50 thousand students. This training enhances their joining work as primary school teachers and secondary-level professors, social workers, computer science teachers and technicians and other specialties.

Women have been favored by the health programmes implemented, especially by the Maternal and Child Programme which carries out actions aimed at responsible maternity and paternity, with the purpose of making increasingly higher the quality of the attention to women's maternity and the care of the newborn, with the involvement of fathers and the family in these essential social functions. The State fosters and implements all the specific health programmes for women, especially those related to mental health, early cancer detection and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. In the same way, it provides the ways and means to ensure women's right to freely decide on their fecundity.

The National Plan of Action to Follow-Up Beijing Conference, promulgated by the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba in 1997, containing 90 governmental measures of compulsory fulfillment, covering all action fields, from employment to the laws, and which is assessed periodically, has contributed to all the achievements.

All this progress undoubtedly has been achieved despite the consequences of the unjust and unilateral economic, commercial and financial blockade that the US government has imposed on my country for more than 45 years; despite the implementation of extraterritorial and murderous acts, terrorist threats and aggressions and the adoption of new interfering measures, all this under the purpose of terminating and destroying a free, sovereign, democratic country, only on account of having an independent economic, political and social development path.

Only a united, tenacious and optimistic people, aware of everything it creates and defends is able to carry out such deed.

We have progressed in the advancement of Cuban women and we know the obstacles we shall overcome and the challenges ahead. Undoubtedly, this success lies on the coherence between a just gender equality concept and the political will of putting it into practice, for which it has been essential, in the Cuban experience, the design and implementation of general and sectorial policies specifically aimed at the promotion of women, the implementation of programmes, creation of mechanisms, action planning, earmarking budgetary resources and the development of cultural, systemic and

systematic programmes aimed at the struggle for the introduction of ideas of equality and justice, women's historical demands to construct a true culture of equality.

From all these advances, I would highlight the changes in the subjectivity of Cuban women and men, due to its relevance and significance: from the meek, dependent, inferior women of the past, to the self-confident, emancipated, dignified and capable women of today; women with recognized and exercised rights. An indispensable political, working and social force for the plans outlined by *my* country to construct a better and more just society with all, women and men, and the well-being of all.

Thank you very much.