

Statement

by

**H.E. Mr. Kim Sam-hoon
Permanent Representative of
the Republic of Korea
to the United Nations**

at

**the 49th Session of the
Commission on the Status of Women**

Madam Chair,

It is a great pleasure for me to address the 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Korea.

As we celebrate the decennial of the Fourth World Conference on Women, I am confident that under your able leadership and with the hard work of the Secretariat, we will mark another important milestone in the advancement of women. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the commitment of the government of the Republic of Korea to work with you and the member states to enhance the status of women around the world.

A decade ago, as we adopted the Beijing Platform for Action, we were filled with a sense of optimism about change for the better in the condition of women around the world.

Today, we are gathered here to assess the progress we have made, as well as the elements that have impeded our progress, and to chart the next course of action to carry us forward.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, gender mainstreaming has been firmly established as the key strategy to achieve gender equality, and all the member states present here have worked hard to integrate gender perspectives into all our policies and programmes.

The government of the Republic of Korea has also strived to fulfill the goals of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Beijing Platform for Action has provided invaluable guidance for my government in translating its political will into action and setting up the necessary machineries for the advancement of women's status.

Having said that, I am pleased to announce that my country has just made another big step towards a gender equal society by abolishing the family headship system, which has been a prime example of discrimination against women.

Beginning with the enactment of the Women's Development Act in 1995, my government has developed and implemented a comprehensive plan for the advancement of women. Some of the measures taken include

the adoption of the Basic Plan for Women's Policies, designation of Women's Policy Officers across government ministries in 1998, founding of the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2001 and the Women's Policy Coordination Committee in 2002, and the establishment of the Women's Affairs Committee of the Korean National Assembly in 2003. Furthermore, the Office of the Secretary to the President for Balanced Personnel Management was created in 2003 in order to expand women's participation in the public sector.

In particular, the Ministry of Gender Equality, as a full-fledged government body, has seen a major overhaul of its budget, staff, and mandate, with a Minister, who, as a member of the cabinet, ensures that a gender perspective is introduced into all government policies.

These vigorous efforts have received positive feedback from the international community, namely this Commission and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Further, my Government has sought to share its experiences and lessons learned with other countries in the region by hosting the Regional Meeting of National Machineries for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific Region in 1996 and 2003 in concert with UNESCAP.

Since its inception, the Ministry of Gender Equality has spearheaded efforts to create a gender equal society both in the home and the workplace. These efforts consist of such institutional reforms as repealing discriminatory laws and practices like the male family headship system, together with practical measures to boost women's employment such as providing childcare and preventing sexual harassment. Moreover, beginning last year, gender mainstreaming tools such as gender sensitive budgeting and gender based analysis of all government policies have been in operation, helping usher in a truly gender equal policy-making process.

My government has made headway in the area of promoting women's human rights and eliminating violence against women through a series of major legislative actions. These include the enactment of the 1994 Act on the Prevention of Sexual Violence and Protection of Victims Thereof and the 1997 Act on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims Thereof, together with respective comprehensive plans.

More recently, in 2004 the Act on the Punishment of Procuring Prostitution and Associated Acts and the Act on the Prevention of Prostitution and Protection of Victims Thereof were enacted to address the issue of sexual exploitation of women.

These Acts encompass sweeping measures to prosecute all aspects of prostitution, including cracking down on trafficking for purposes of sexual predation, confiscating profits from related transactions, and extending protection to victims of forced prostitution. Hence, these Acts signal the changing perception that violence against women, in whatever form, goes beyond being a personal tragedy; rather, it tells us that it is an issue that affects society as a whole, and that the state is responsible for eliminating all forms of violence against women.

As of December last year, there is a network of assistance in operation to protect and aid victims of violence, including a hotline number, 95 counseling centers for victims of sexual violence, 182 centers for victims of domestic violence and 63 shelters, all of which offer legal, medical, and psychiatric assistance. In addition, one noteworthy achievement of the past year is that, along with on-going financial aid to World War II victims of sexual slavery, we have created a cyberspace museum aimed at educating the public about these human right violations.

Madam Chair,

In order to bring about the changes we have thus far discussed, women must be empowered. This means that women's equitable representation at the political, economic, social, and cultural sphere must be reinforced.

In this regard, the role of women in the public sector who serve as agents of change is of particular importance. The government of the Republic of Korea has taken measures to bolster women's participation in the policy-making process by employing a variety of tools, such as quotas. As a result of these efforts, more women than ever are working in the government, from 27.3% in 1995 to 34 % in 2003.

Fostering women's leadership in the political arena is another important objective, and the Korean government is furthering this goal by means of legislation mandating that a certain percentage of candidatures to

the parliament, as well as to local governments, be allocated to women. The 2004 general election results show that the percentage of women parliamentary members has increased from 5.9% to 13%.

Madam Chair,

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the future of a nation depends in large part on how well it utilizes its human resources. In most instances, this means greater participation of women, who are the traditionally marginalized group, as equal members of the workforce. My government is tapping into the vast potential of women by facilitating their integration into the workforce, creating gender-sensitive work environments and generating more meaningful opportunities for their employment.

However, in order to allow women to reach their full potential in the workplace, the government and the employer must each share part of burden. Toward this end, my government is doing its best to expand working mothers' access to affordable and high-quality child-care services.

Madam Chair,

Korean women have been witness to rapid changes in gender roles in virtually every aspect of society, including women's status itself. Although on the legal and institutional fronts there has been much progress, much still remains to be done in changing people's mindsets and practices regarding women's place in society. We recognize that genuine gender equality will only be achieved through full partnership with our male colleagues. A gender policy that is not grounded in the mutual cooperation of both genders, or one that works to exclude one gender, is bound to fail.

It has been a principle of the Ministry of Gender Equality to pursue gender policies with the full participation of men, through development of gender sensitive education programs and other tools.

The significance of this partnership in pursuing gender equality is nowhere more prevalent than in the changing roles men play in the family. Our society has undergone tremendous evolution in a relatively short period of time, and accordingly, notions of the family and interactions between its members have also changed. More and more women are joining the workforce, and as a result, the need to delegate duties traditionally perceived

as women's work, such as child rearing and caring for elders, has risen dramatically. I believe these burdens should be shared by society as a whole. In order to better deal with the winds of change, projects are in the pipeline to expand the mandate of the Ministry of Gender Equality to cover family policies.

Madam Chair,

Since the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted, gender perspective has become an important factor in the policy-making of many states, and gender stereotyping has abated to some degree. No doubt these are remarkable achievements.

Yet for all of the successes, there still remain just as many stumbling blocks that stand in the way of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. These include poverty, illiteracy, social and cultural biases, and budgetary constraints, to name just a few. In addition, we are faced with new challenges such as ageing, trafficking, and women migrant workers.

In this sense, this session is a timely opportunity for us to assess past progress and to build a new paradigm for the advancement of women in the future. I would like to conclude by reiterating the commitment of the government of the Republic of Korea to working with all the member states toward our common goal, the empowerment of women throughout world.

Thank you.