

THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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STATEMENT

By

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Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express my satisfaction with the opportunity to participate in the 54th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in the year when we are marking 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Before I proceed, I would like to join other delegations in expressing the deepest condolences to the Government and the people of Chile over the recent earthquake and to reiterate our support to and solidarity with the Government and people of Haiti.

My delegation aligned itself with the statement made by Spain on behalf of the European Union; I shall therefore focus in my statement on steps taken at the national level with regard to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with a view to achieving full equality between men and women.

Mr. Chairman,

Serbia has established a clear overall policy and adopted a legislation framework for promoting the rights of women and gender equality. They include laws and regulations, as well as a set of strategic documents. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia provides for the creation of equal opportunities, introduction of special interim measures, aimed at achieving full gender equality, prohibition of sexual abuse, equality in marriage and family and freedom to decide on childbirth, as well as special protection for mothers. The recently adopted Gender Equality Act encompasses all the matters related to gender equality and the creation of conditions for the policy of equal opportunity and exercise of the rights of women and men. Gender equality mechanisms are in place in Serbia at national, provincial and local levels.

Let me present some statistical data on women and men in Serbia: women account for 51.4 per cent of the country's population. Of those who have jobs, women account for 44 per cent, while the pay gap is still about 16 per cent to the detriment of women. Today women represent 22.4 per cent of the members of Parliament, while 8.5 per cent of Ministers are women. Even though these data show that there is still a lot to be done to achieve full gender equality, it is important to stress that there is a constant increase in the number of women holding high-ranking positions in all three branches of government. The Speaker of the Parliament, as well as the ministers of finance, justice, telecommunications, youth and sports and the National Investment Plan in the Government of Serbia are women. There are more women than men in the judiciary including high-ranking positions (64 per cent of judges are women). It is worth noting that the presence of women in police and military is also increasing.

Bearing in mind the importance of the engagement of women in peacemaking and peace-building operations, 14 women from Serbia have been engaged in several UN peacekeeping operations so far. As a

country of the region that in the recent past went through a period of conflicts and intolerance, Serbia recognizes the significance and is fully committed to the implementation of the Security Council cornerstone resolution 1325, whose tenth anniversary we will commemorate this year, as well as all subsequent Security Council resolutions related to women, peace and security. To that end let me inform you that Serbia recently initiated the process of elaboration of the National Action Plan for the implementation of resolution 1325.

After a turbulent and difficult period of the 90s, my country has embarked upon a complex process of economic and social transition aimed at accelerating its European integration. These reform processes affect all areas of social life and are particularly demanding and challenging with a view to achieving high standards related to gender equality and the promotion of the position of women, particularly in the context of the current global economic crisis.

In order to overcome the gaps in the position of women and men, this issue has been treated in various strategic documents, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy within the framework of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, the Strategy against Human Trafficking, the National Strategy against Violence etc. Furthermore, the comprehensive National Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Women and the Advancement of Gender Equality, developed in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, was adopted in February 2009. An Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy has been completed and is to be adopted soon. The process of development of the National Strategy took up ten months and, in addition to the members of the governmental Council for Gender Equality, involved 34 NGOs and various experts in this field. The Strategy defines overall policy of the government aimed at the elimination of discrimination against women, bearing in mind that the improvement of the status of women and gender mainstreaming are vital elements of the modernization and democratization of the society. It enables not only extension and deepening of the current capacities and programmes, but ensures systemic action towards establishment, development, implementation and promotion of equal opportunity policy. As such, it represents a turning point in the public policy towards women and demonstrates the commitment of Serbia to the human rights protection and promotion by creating conditions for their effective exercise.

There is no doubt that there exists a strong political will in Serbia today for, and a commitment to, the advancement and promotion of gender equality through the introduction of modern standards and the fulfilment of relevant international obligations. Serbia presented its Initial Report to the CEDAW Committee in 2007 and preparations are currently underway for the submission of combined 2nd and 3rd report to the Committee in spring this year. However, there is still obvious discrepancy between the intentions and results, i.e. between the legislation and strategies and their full enforcement and implementation. There is also a sensitive issue of gender stereotypes that should be tackled through the shift in the mind-set that requires constant engagement in the field of education and media. We are thus aware that we must persevere in a continued investment of efforts in this area.

Mr. Chairman,

All the activities undertaken at the national level so far could not have been conducted without close cooperation with relevant international and regional organizations, as well as with civil society. To that end, I would like to express my appreciation for the strong support provided by UNDP and UNIFEM, as well as by European regional organizations and institutions and their assistance in capacity-building and the implementation of relevant projects in my country. Also, I would like to underline the importance we bestow to the continuing enhancement of our cooperation with the civil sector and the establishment of a network of gender equality mechanisms in the region of South East Europe.

Serbia fully supports the international efforts, aimed at achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and recognizes the leading role of the United Nations in that regard. We therefore believe that the ongoing negotiations on the composite UN gender entity within the wider process of System Wide Coherence should be conducted in good faith and in a manner that will lead to the establishment of a strong UN gender mechanism during the course of the current session of the General Assembly.

Thank you for your attention.