



***Permanent Mission of the Republic of Zimbabwe  
to the United Nations***

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**STATEMENT BY**

**HON. O.N. MUCHENA**

**MINISTER OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS, GENDER AND COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT**

**AT THE**

**54<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF  
WOMEN**

**2 MARCH 2010**

**NEW YORK**

**Check against Delivery**

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Chairperson,

Zimbabwe aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the African Group. Zimbabwe is pleased to participate in the 54<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women that is reviewing the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome Document of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of the General Assembly and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To that end, I thank the UN Secretary-General for his reports which provides a basis for our deliberations.

Chairperson,

My Government is fully aware that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will not be reached unless gender equality strategies are incorporated into our work at national, regional and international levels. It is therefore of paramount importance that Member States prioritise the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome Document of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of the General Assembly which facilitates the achievement of the MDG targets.

Chairperson,

As a way of domesticating the regional and international commitments ratified by my Government we have put in place policies and programmes to support initiatives aimed at **promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women**. In addition, the constitution of Zimbabwe prohibits discrimination on the grounds gender among other issues. The constitution also provides for affirmative action to accelerate equality between women and men. We have enacted several gender responsive laws to promote the legal status of women. These include laws that give majority status to women, protect inheritance rights, criminalization of sexual offences, maternity rights, equal pay for work of equal value, and the right to participate in public life. *One of our recent legislative achievements* is the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act which aims at preventing domestic violence and protecting the victims.

On **violence against women**, my Government with the support of our partners has embarked on a programme to establish one stop centres to ensure that survivors of domestic violence (mostly women and children) receive health care, psycho-social support and legal aid in one spot. Nevertheless, the full implementation of these laws is fraught with challenges such as popularisation and enforcement. The non-reportage of domestic violence and the absence of sex disaggregated data on all issues for instance, makes it problematic to

enforce the relevant laws. Information dissemination which aims at educating women of their rights, so that they can claim them, is limited by the lack of financial resources. In addition, most of the laws are also ineffective because of low legal literacy and inability to afford legal representation.

Chairperson,

My Government has made some strides in **promoting the participation of women in politics and decision making**. Women hold key government positions of Vice-President, Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Senate, Deputy Speaker of the Lower House and Judge President of the High Court. However, we are concerned with the low representation of women in other areas of decision making which stands at 33.3% in the Upper House of Parliament, 14% Lower House of Parliament; 18.4 in Cabinet; 18.8% in Local Councils. The women of Zimbabwe are vigorously campaigning and demanding, through the current constitution making process, for a 50-50 representation in all decision-making processes, in line with the African Union and SADC Protocols on Gender and Development which my Government has ratified. The challenge we are facing is on mobilising resources for outreach campaigns.

Chairperson,

Regarding the **eradication of poverty and hunger**, my Government has established a Women's Development Fund and a Community Development Fund to specifically finance economic empowerment projects for women, particularly those who cannot afford collateral to borrow from financial institutions and to cater for rural women who need financial resources for their community and/or agricultural projects. Under the land reform programme, a 20% special quota was reserved for women. In addition my Government is making concerted efforts to increase women's access to productive resources in the key sectors of the economy namely agriculture, industry and commerce.

Poverty levels remain a major challenge for Zimbabwe, and are undermining the progress that has been made in the implementation the Beijing Platform for Action and attainment of the MDG targets. The recurrent droughts, the illegal sanctions imposed on my country by the some Western countries have severely impacted on the country's development. My Government lacks adequate financial resources to emerge from the economic strangulation that it experienced in the past decade.

Chairperson,

Despite the effort that my Government has made to promote gender equality and empowerment of women, Zimbabwe is facing major challenges with regards to the **status of maternal health**. This is due to the inability of the health infrastructure to cope with the demand for health services as a result of the under-performance of our economy and the subsequent brain drain of our skilled labour force to 'greener pastures'. We are grateful to the support that we are getting from our partners but we encourage the international community to further assist us in harnessing maternal mortality.

Chairperson,

Zimbabwe is experiencing a decline in new HIV/AIDS infections as reflected in the 15 to 24 year olds prevalence whose rate of infection declined from 26.5% in 2001 to 11.9% in 2009. This is the first such decline in HIV prevalence in Southern Africa and it is related to behaviour change as a result of interventions by Government, the international community and local players. The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to pose particular challenges to women's health and impose extra burden on them as care givers.

Chairperson,

Regarding **environmental sustainability**, the women of Zimbabwe face day to day challenges as a result of the impact of climate change. A majority of our women are employed in the agricultural sector, and are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood. My Government is however putting mechanisms to ensure women's access to resources and be involved in decision-making processes so as to reduce their vulnerability to climate change.

Chairperson,

With regards to **achieving universal primary education**, the Government has attained gender parity. The education curriculum for primary schools has since been reviewed to ensure that it is gender sensitive. We have put in place a social safety net (BEAM) to assist vulnerable children with tuition, particularly the girl child. However, the education sector is facing a number of challenges the Government is grappling with.

Chairperson,

With regards to the **development of global partnership for development**, the current country's relationship with some key development partners and multilateral development banks has remained strained. Consequently, most of

the country's traditional development partners are only engaged in the area of humanitarian assistance while funding for development programmes is very low.

Chairperson,

As Member States engage in inter-governmental negotiations of the gender entity, my Government supports the establishment of a gender entity which stresses the importance of stronger and effective presence at the country level. We hope the entity will provide Member States with the much needed technical and policy advice needed to speed up the implementation of the Beijing Declaration.

Chairperson,

In conclusion, Chairperson, My Government emphasises the importance of the allocation of financial resources for economic empowerment programmes for women, for this is critical in realising the goals of the Beijing Platform of Action and the achievement of the MDGs.

I thank you.