

Statement by H.E. Dr. Jang Hajin
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The 39th Session of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination
Against Women

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<Introduction>

Honorable Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

I am very glad to have this opportunity to talk to you on the subject of the 5th and 6th Periodic Reports submitted by the Government of the Republic of Korea on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. This occasion holds particular meaning for me as I am for the first time representing the Government of the Republic of Korea as head of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, which replaced the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2005.

The impact of the CEDAW in the formulation of policies by the Government of the Republic of Korea has been profound, with the ROK government displaying a strong political will to achieve gender equality.

Since ratifying the CEDAW in 1984, the Government of the Republic of Korea has taken proactive measures to achieve the advancement of women through comprehensive and systematic means, submitting six reports to date and holding three sessions of constructive dialogue with the Committee. In particular, the Government of the Republic of Korea has concentrated on putting in place the institutional mechanisms for the enhancement of the status of women and focused on ensuring that such institutions become firmly established.

As a result of such efforts there has been remarkable progress in achieving gender equality in laws and institutions. Indeed, the last ten years have yielded remarkable advances in women's rights, marking a time of fresh impetus for real change and achieving actual improvements in women's rights.

I would now like to briefly comment on the matters set out in the 5th and 6th National reports as well as key measures that the Korean government has taken to implement the Convention following the submission of the 2006 report.

<Substance>

■ Strengthening Gender-Discrimination Laws and Policies

In 2005, we abolished the family headship system, which was an archetypal policy discriminating against women. The elimination of the family headship system, a long cherished hope of Korean women, signifies a drastic change in the family structure. It has paved the way for the achievement of gender equality for future generations. This has cleared the way for the withdrawal of reservations on Article 16(g) of the Convention, the only article in the Convention on which we had reservations.

Furthermore, in accordance with Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 16 of the CEDAW and General Recommendation No. 21 of the Committee, we are pursuing an amendment of civil law to adjust the legal age for engagement and marriage to 18 years of age for both women and men.

In 2001, years of earnest efforts bore fruit with the foundation of the National Human Rights Commission, an independent body dedicated to human rights. The Commission has been clear on the prohibition of discrimination against women, defining discrimination based on gender in Article 2 of its act, as a form of "infringement of rights to equality".

In addition, by revising the Equal Employment Act, we have been clear on the prohibition of indirect discrimination. In 2005, the Affirmative Action Plan to improve employment practices, mainly focusing on the Female Employment Target Policy, was brought into effect. As a result, actual steps are being taken to reduce indirect forms of discrimination in employment.

These measures are the fruit of the commitment of the Republic of Korea, as a State Party to the Convention, which fully respects the spirit of the Convention, to amend gender-discriminating laws and regulations to implement the recommendations of the Committee.

■ Systems to Reinforce Women's Policies and the Pursuit of Gender Mainstreaming Strategies

The launch of the Ministry of Gender Equality as a central government ministry in 2001 marked a breakthrough in the promotion of women's policies. The 41-member Presidential Commission on Women's Affairs of 1998 was reborn as the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2001 and later expanded into the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in 2005. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, with a budget of 1.3 Billion US Dollars (1.1665 trillion won), which has expanded 38 folds relative to its 2001 budget of 27.8 Million US Dollars (30.3 Billion won) is now serving as the major state organization dedicated to women's policies.

Establishing a system for women's policies has been the driving force behind our efforts to advance women's policies over the past decade. As a result, women's policies now encompass a wider range of policy areas, and great progress has been made in laws and institutions.

Under the First Basic Plan for Women's Policies that was implemented from 1998 to 2002, an Office of Women's Policy was established in six central government ministries. In addition, various laws, regulations and rules that discriminated against women have been identified and revised. In particular, through a review of the entire legislation of the ROK, which took place in two stages from the second part of 2005 to the first part of 2006, 385 gender-discriminative provisions have been identified and these are currently being improved.

Following the Second Basic Plan for Women's Policies, implemented from 2003 to 2007, we have now achieved the institutionalization of the Women's Policy Coordination Committee under the Office of the Prime Minister. In addition, public officials at the level of Deputy Minister in central government organizations have been appointed as Senior Gender Policy Coordinators. An inter-ministerial system for the promotion of women's policies is therefore in place.

It is with the aim of achieving fundamental advances in reducing discrimination against women that the Government of the Republic of Korea launched the Korean Institute for Gender Equality Promotion and Education (KIGEPE) in 2003. We are also developing a variety of educational programs customized according to life stages and target population groups, and disseminating these programs to educational institutions nationwide.

In particular, the KIGEPE is conducting gender-sensitivity training for public officials across the nation in order to ensure that equality is achieved between men and women in the realization of government policies.

As for the Korean Women's Development Institute, which was established in 1983, following the 1975 International Year of Women and the recommendations of the United Nations, it has been modified in 2000 to function purely as a women's policies research organization. During the past 2 decades, approximately 90 researchers, including doctorate level specialists from diverse sectors, have been formulating and advising on government policies on women's issues of various fields such as law, politics, education, labor, family and health.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family is pursuing a number of initiatives to support and cooperate with women's groups. Since 2001, we have been strengthening such cooperation through joint cooperative initiatives between the private sector and the government. We are forming close networks by supporting the Korean Women's Conference and the National Women's Conference and thereby strengthening partnerships for the effective pursuit of women's policies.

Honorable Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

The Republic of Korea is deeply committed to embracing gender mainstreaming and is resolved to abide by the Beijing Platform for Action and to implement the CEDAW in concrete ways.

In December 2002, the Women's Development Act was revised with the aim of ensuring that gender impact was taken into account in the formulation of all government policies, thereby serving as a foundation for the

pursuit of women's policies. And an analysis of gender-impact in policy in central government bodies and local government is currently under way.

Moreover, in order to ensure that the gender equality perspective is taken into consideration in the policy-making process, the Statistical Act stipulates that gender-disaggregated data be incorporated as part of the criteria for the approval of statistical data. In accordance with the National Fiscal Act enacted in 2006, gender-sensitive budget policy will enter into effect in 2010. This represents a milestone in reinforcing gender equality in the budgets of government ministries by fully reflecting gender sensitivity in the allocation of the nation's financial resources. To ensure the success of the policy, the Korean Institute for Gender Equality Promotion and Education (KIGEPE) is conducting training on gender budgets for public officials in central ministries and local governments.

■ Special Measures to Eliminate Discrimination against Women

Traditionally the participation of women in society has been relatively low in Korea and due to the remnants of the patriarchal society, women still do not play a full part in many fields, including politics.

The government of the Republic of Korea is therefore implementing special legal and policy measures to address discrimination against women and to spur women's participation in society.

On the political front, we have amended the Act on Elections for Public Offices so that when a party nominates candidates for proportional representation in National Assembly or Local Council elections, more than 50% of the candidates must be women. For representatives on regional assemblies, it is recommended that more than 30% of the candidates nominated be women. As a result, the ratio of women representatives in the 17th National Assembly is 14.3%, a surge from the figure of 5.9% in the 16th National Assembly. We are witnessing moves forward in the part that women play in politics, an area in which their participation was particularly weak.

We are striving to incorporate gender equality into the policy decision-making process to ensure gender equality in the formulation of national policies. We are implementing the Women's Participation Target Initiative for government committees and planning to pursue the Women Managers Employment Target Initiative by 2011, in order to raise the proportion of women public officials at Rank 4, equivalent to Director-level and above in central government bodies. With the implementation of this policy, the proportion of women in government committees is expected to increase to 40% and the proportion of women in public posts of Rank 4 and above is expected to reach 10%, representing a two-fold increase from 2006. We have also established guidelines for the management of human resources to raise the proportion of non-regular Directors from outside the company accounted for by women to over 30% in state-owned companies and government-affiliated Institutions. In ways such as this we are promoting the advancement of women into managerial positions in enterprises.

In 2000, we abandoned the Military Service Credit System, which had been a major stumbling block for women seeking careers in public service. From 1996 to 2002, we implemented the Women's Employment Initiative, which led to a constant rise in the ratio of females in public service posts. Building on the success of this policy, we are enforcing the Gender Equality Employment Initiative, effective from 2003 to 2007. We anticipate that these special initiatives will address the imbalance between the genders in public posts, resulting in a higher proportion of women in higher-ranking positions.

In the area of education, the 2006 College enrollment rate of women was of 81.8%, thus showing little difference from that of men, which was 82.9%.

Following this fact and in order to promote the advancement of women into managerial level positions within the educational field, we have since 2006 been implementing a plan for the expansion of the Employment Target for Women Professors, based on the National Human Resources Development Plan, since 2006. Furthermore, we are currently pursuing the Women Principal and Vice-Principal Employment Target Policy in order to raise the proportion of women in supervisory positions in elementary, middle and high schools.

In national defense, the Korean Air Force Academy began accepting women applicants in 1997, and the navy and air force subsequently adopted the system for female officer candidates in 2001. Pursuant to the Military Reform Plan to gradually expand the ratio of women amongst high-ranking military officers, the number of women military officers will be increased by 2020.

■ Strengthened Response to Violence against Women

The Republic of Korea has also achieved remarkable progress in the prevention of violence against women and the protection of women's rights.

To protect women's rights in the investigative process, a system has been introduced under which there is a prosecutor and police officer dedicated to sexual assault cases. In the case of certain sex criminals in whom it is recognized that there is a possibility of repeat offences, there are plans to introduce the use of electronic tracking devices. We are pursuing various policies that encompass rehabilitation and treatment programs for sexual offenders as well as expanding adolescent behavior cognition programs.

Moreover, in order to prevent female victims of violence from being exposed to secondary damage, avoiding the inconvenience they experienced in an onerous search for institutions of counseling, medical, legal or investigation-related services, we are providing support through relevant services in a comprehensive manner. For this reason, we have established and are operating one-stop support centers at 14 hospitals nationwide for female victims of violence.

The criteria for the punishment of sexual crimes against teenagers have been strengthened with the recent amendment of the Act on Protection of Youth from Sexual Exploitation. Key amendments in the Act include limiting the employment of sex criminals and no longer stipulating sex crimes as crimes subject to punishment only in the case of the filing of a complaint by the victim and as crimes that are not punishable against the wishes of the victim.

In addition, to protect victims in need of special support such as children under the age of 13 and mentally challenged children, the children's support center for sexual assault cases has been set up. In this way we are providing customized services for target groups.

As countermeasures to prostitution, the Act on the Punishment of Procuring Prostitution and Associated Acts and the Act on the Prevention of Prostitution and Protection of Victims were enacted in 2004 and these are

currently being implemented. Key elements of the Acts include stricter punishment against procurers of prostitution and providing protection and services for women victimized by prostitution.

As well as implementing this legislation, in order to enhance the effectiveness of these laws the government of the Republic of Korea launched the Comprehensive Action Plan to Prevent Prostitution in 2004. A stronger system for the promotion of such policy has been formed, as evidenced by the launch of the Task Force under the Office of the Prime Minister, to monitor the Implementation of the Prostitution Prevention Measures and review progress made.

With the Implementation of the law, punishment of sex procurers has been strengthened and the concept of victims of sex trafficking has been introduced. As a result, female victims of prostitution have been exempted from punishment and their debts to sex trafficking brokers, which acted as stumbling block to the victims' rehabilitation, have been invalidated.

Following the bringing into effect of the laws to prevent prostitution, initiatives to support the rehabilitation of women affected by prostitution have advanced beyond the previous practices of mere protection to a system which offers not only counseling, but the provision of medical support, vocational training, legal support and financing for women opting to start their own business. As can be seen, services have been refined at all stages of rehabilitation. Moreover, through constant controls on and punishment of procurers of prostitution we are seeking to break the chain of exploitation for women in prostitution.

In addition, the government of the Republic of Korea hosted three conferences for experts in the Prevention of International Human Trafficking from 2003 to 2005 and has participated in regional Ministerial-level talks and *ASEM Seminars on the Prevention of Female and Child Trafficking*. We are seeking to identify effective strategies and exploring measures for cooperation at the international level to tackle the problem of human trafficking, a problem which is deepening both within Korea and abroad.

In Korea, the past perception of violence against women as a private issue is changing. There is a growing social awareness that the state does in fact have a responsibility to address this important issue at the national level. There also seems to be stronger recognition amongst ordinary people that prostitution is illegal, as is shown through the increase in public awareness from 30.4% to 93.2%. Moreover, judicial punishment and response to violence against women are being strengthened and the budget for victim protection has been increased substantially.

■ Addressing Disproportionate Concentration in Women's Employment and Occupations

The rate of participation by women in Korea in economic activities has risen from 52% in 2000 to 54.8 % in 2006. There has been an overall upward trend. However, as of 2005, Korea is still lagging behind the OECD average for the rate of participation by women in economic activities of 60.4%

In Korean society, there is an increasing common understanding that female talent is a valuable asset for the advancement of the national economy. The Republic of Korea is endeavoring to create jobs and promote job security for women and to redress discrimination against female temporary workers.

In 2006, the First five-year Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Women Resources and the Female Employment Expansion Measures were established with various government organizations involved in the efforts to raise the level of participation of women in the workforce. Moreover, we are strengthening

childcare support in the workplace and increasing the percentage borne by society for maternity protection costs. By adopting the Policy of Subsidies for Continued Employment after Childbirth, we are enhancing job security for female temporary workers and forming the basis for the practical protection of maternity rights.

To fully utilize the female workforce, it is a prerequisite to have social facilities such as childcare centers that women can safely entrust their children to. We are strengthening the public contribution to childcare by increasing childcare subsidies and providing childcare services for infants, disabled children and children of working mothers. We are also improving the quality of childcare services with the adoption of the Childcare Evaluation and Accreditation policy.

The Childcare Budget has been increased up to 500% in 2007 from that of 2002, reaching 1.16 Billion US Dollars (1.1435 trillion won), and Childcare facilities have been provided free of charge for low income families. Since 2006, basic subsidies for children under 2 years of age are being provided and as from next year, basic subsidies will be provided to 3 to 5 years old children as well.

Nevertheless, the reality is that discrepancies in male and female employment ratios and wages, a gender-discriminating labor market and labor practices still continue.

It is no exaggeration to say that a nation's competitiveness in the 21st century is dependent on the utilization of the female workforce. In order to make full use of the capabilities of women and develop their potential, the government of the Republic of Korea will further increase its commitment to addressing gender discrimination in employment and fostering an environment conducive to creating jobs for women.

■ Addressing Disproportionate Concentration in Career Choices

We are seeking to move beyond the conventional job choices for women following stereotypical gender roles. To this end, we are making efforts to prompt women, who represent a resource pool of great potential in the knowledge-based society of the 21st century, to choose the field of science and technology, and encouraging female students to enter the fields of science and technology, an area that was traditionally dominated by men.

In 2002, we enacted the Act on Supporting Women in Science and Technology and established the Basic Plan for Female Science and Technology Specialists. With these initiatives, we have launched WISE (Women in Science and Engineering), a science education program designed to encourage the participation of female students. We are also offering scholarships to female students who excel in science and technology. Furthermore, we have implemented the recruitment target system for women scientists. In addition we have built infrastructure such as the support center for female scientists and engineers to encourage the nurturing of female experts in science and technology.

■ Family Policy

Korean society is undergoing a shift in the family system due to the changing family structures and forms, more diverse family values, a rise in the break up of families such as cases of divorce, and an increase in international marriages. It was to actively respond to these changes that the Ministry of Gender Equality was reshaped into the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in June 2005.

We have established the Act on Healthy Families and the Five-Year Family Policy Plan to build the foundation for a universal and comprehensive family policy. Furthermore, we have supported initiatives for low-income single parent households and welfare centers for single parents and children. This is to help low-income single parent households and unmarried mothers who are in need of a social safety net.

As part of efforts to bring about change in the male-oriented family culture and create a family-friendly social environment, we have developed and applied the Family Friendliness Index (FFI), an indicator to measure a company's operation of family-friendly programs.

Recently, there has been a steep rise in international marriages in Korea. As a result, we are facing new challenges and are seeking to come up with ways to provide support to and protect the rights of female immigrants in international marriages.

The government of the Republic of Korea has established the Policy for Social Integration of Families with Migrant Women in 2006 and has formed a Task Force, comprising representatives of 12 Ministries, to monitor progress made. In cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), we are establishing a system to prevent the infringement of the human rights of migrant women in international marriages. We are planning to provide information and training on Korean husbands and Korean culture prior to the marriage, thereby seeking to take active steps to prevent the infringement of the human rights of migrant women.

We are providing support for the assimilation of migrant women into Korean society through support centers for migrant women. These centers provide comprehensive services such as Korean language training and family counseling that the women may well urgently need as they bring up their children and adjust to life here.

■ Rural Women

The 2005 agricultural and fishery population of the Republic of Korea is of 7.5% and among them women account for 53%. The government of the Republic of Korea has put in place various policies to improve the lives of and nurture skills in rural women and provide them with welfare benefits.

We are pursuing welfare policies to improve rural women's quality of life such as the workload support system for female agricultural workers, the expansion of the helper support system for rural households with newborns and the expansion of women farmers' centers. Furthermore, we are fostering female farmers as agricultural specialists through tailored training to upgrade women's skills in the field of agricultural management.

We are encouraging the expansion of the Rural Household Management Agreement that aims at the rational running of farming households. We are also planning to revise relevant laws to formally acknowledge the occupational status of female farmers by certifying their engagement in agricultural work. This will help female farmers to take pride in being agricultural experts as well as protect women's rights as managers of agricultural businesses.

< Conclusion >

Honorable Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

It is with the support of the international community's support, the strong political will and commitment to women's policies of the Government of the Republic of Korea, and the participation of NGOs and partnerships forged with them that the achievements so far have been made possible.

However, despite the progress over the past decade, we need to redouble our efforts. Indeed, there are still many challenges ahead on the road to achieving the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, the ultimate goal of the Convention.

I look forward to a constructive and productive dialogue in the course of this review. The Delegation of the Republic of Korea will be pleased to respond in all sincerity to any questions raised by the Committee members. We will readily listen to any suggestions and recommendations made in the discussions with the Committee and take proactive steps to put those recommendations into practice.

The Government of the Republic of Korea believes it is vital to promote understanding and awareness of the content of the CEDAW and recommendations of the Committee amongst the general public and NGOs. We have previously held a reporting session on the results of the integrated review of the 3rd and 4th Reports in July 1998. We are committed also to holding a reporting session to raise public awareness on this evaluation and the Committee's recommendations.

I would like to bring my remarks to a close by expressing my appreciation for and paying tribute to the hard work and dedication of the members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in their tireless efforts to achieve the global and universal enhancement of women's rights.

Thank you.