



*Permanent Mission of*  
**Malaysia**  
*to the United Nations*

---

---

*(Please check against delivery)*

**STATEMENT BY**

**THE HONOURABLE DATO' SRI DR. NG YEN YEN  
MINISTER OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, MALAYSIA  
ON**

**AGENDA ITEM 3: FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON  
WOMEN AND TO THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY, ENTITLED WOMEN 2000: GENDER EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT  
AND PEACE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

**OF THE FIFTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE  
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**NEW YORK, 4 MARCH 2009**

---

Mr. Chairperson,

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you, the Bureau, as well as the Secretariat on the excellent arrangements made thus far in this Fifty-Third Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

2. I would also like to express Malaysia's appreciation to the Secretary-General and his representatives who have presented his reports, as well as to the speakers that we have had in the various panel discussions – all of whom have framed our agenda during this session to concentrate on our theme of "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS".

3. The Government of Malaysia stands by our commitments to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. As we approach the fifteen-year review of the Declaration and Platform for Action next year, it is clear that while the international community as a whole has made tremendous progress in the twelve critical areas outlined in that document, barriers persist in the fundamental issue of gender equality that undermine the hope for the full realisation of those commitments. Implicit in the Declaration and Platform for Action is that in efforts for the advancement women, both women and men can contribute, and both genders have an inherent interest in the matter.

4. The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men is something which is intrinsically linked to the overall national development of any country, from roles at the basic societal structure as encompassed in the family, to the larger community structures, and leading to political decision-making. What has not been so clear for the international community and countries however is to implement our past commitments, and to translate the notion of equal sharing into something tangible – so that it can overcome the traditional, institutional or other constraints that prevent its full realisation.

5. In this regard, gender stereotypes continue to remain real barriers to the notion of equal sharing, and the overall goal of the advancement of women. At the international level, including here at the United Nations, we are aware that the discomfort in addressing this issue crosses all regional lines, and crosses levels of development. We have found that even the most advanced, open and liberal countries are averse to discussing this issue, just as much as the countries that may be deemed more conservative. We understand that discussing stereotypes does lead to other discussions which touch on traditional or cultural values. These are difficult for policy-makers and even more so to implement. Even in my own country, chipping away long-held biases and ways of thinking require strenuous efforts. But the outcome is worthwhile, and the international community should not shirk from this.

6. The Government of Malaysia places the utmost importance on gender equality and Malaysian women have made significant progress in various fields, such as in the education, health and economic sectors. An enabling environment has been created through gender sensitive policies and programmes such as the National Policy on Women and Plan of Action for Women's Development as well as the Policy of at Least 30% Women at Decision Making in the Public Sector.

Mr. Chairperson,

7. The various reports on the issue of the HIV/AIDS epidemic submitted by the Secretary-General and by other entities of the United Nations systems, as well as studies by various experts in this field point towards the increasing feminisation of HIV/AIDS. This negative trend has already been observed by medical personnel for a number of years in all regions. As experienced by many countries, the number of women infected with HIV/AIDS in Malaysia has proportionately increased from 1.2% of total new cases in 1990 to 16.4% in 2007. Most of the HIV infections among women occurred as a result of sexual transmission from their spouses. As a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council, it is indeed pertinent that this year, the CSW explicitly addresses this phenomena through its lens of the advancement of women.

8. In Malaysia a Cabinet Committee on HIV/AIDS, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, has been established to provide a forum for discourse and decision making at the highest level. A National Strategic Plan was formulated to provide the framework for Malaysia's response to HIV/AIDS for the period of 2006 to 2010 and

500 million ringgit, or approximately 137 million US dollars, has been allocated for this period. We recognize that efforts to contain the spread of HIV have to be collaborative between, and within, the government and non-governmental sectors. As part of the synergised effort, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development actively advocates the importance of incorporating gender perspectives in HIV/AIDS policy formulation and programme implementation. A special committee of the National Advisory Council on Women to address the feminisation of HIV/AIDS has also been established.

9. The biological vulnerability of the female makes it more important that both men and women take equal responsibility in preventing the spread of HIV among women. Unfortunately, in many countries, sex education is still a taboo subject, hindering the Government's effort in educating both men and women on safe sex, particularly on the use of condoms. Even in my own country, the Government's effort to distribute free condoms was perceived negatively by segments of Malaysian society. Therefore, we have to take cognisance of cultural, traditional and religious sensitivities, yet remain persistent and vigilant in pursuit of our goals.

10. Malaysian women often have to assume the role as head of household, breadwinner and single parent while possibly carrying the burden of care for other family members in single-women headed households. Economic empowerment of women is thus important. Towards this end, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development has intensified its efforts towards increasing women's participation in micro-enterprises. This is done through capacity-building programmes as well as providing grants for women to venture into agro-based enterprises.

11. As the role of caregiving in many societies often falls upon women, it is crucial that in the intersection of caregiving and HIV/AIDS, women are given the utmost support. Here, we stress that men should be sensitised and be involved in shouldering their responsibility in caregiving. To assist families in caregiving, the Government of Malaysia takes the lead in supporting childcare by providing a subsidy of 180 ringgit per child to civil servants whose monthly household income is 3,000 ringgit and below. The Government also provides a community child care subsidy to the low income group in Malaysia, which is categorised as having a monthly household income of below 2,000 ringgit in urban areas, and 1,200 ringgit in rural areas. The enabling childcare policy also includes a childcare tax exemption of up to 2,400 ringgit per year.

12. The landscape of caregiving in Malaysia includes home-based care, hospitals as well as shelter homes. Government hospitals provide high quality HIV treatment such as antiretroviral therapy as well as counselling and psychosocial support. To complement the Government's efforts, NGOs render home-visit services, outreach programmes and drop-in centres, which also cover rural areas. However, there are still gaps to be addressed. Thus, the Government is working closely with the NGOs to train more people, including men, to become quality caregivers.

Mr. Chairperson,

13. At the further confluence of the advancement of women and HIV/AIDS, awareness programmes on HIV/AIDS are being implemented in schools as well as in the National Service Programme. The Healthy Programme without AIDS for Youth (PROSTAR) is conducted to empower youths to become peer educators who disseminate HIV/AIDS information while promoting healthy lifestyle practices. The National Service Programme involving 21.4% of secondary school leavers nationwide annually (approximately 110,000 young people), represents a unique opportunity to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary information, awareness and ability to make informed decisions regarding HIV/AIDS.

13. Another area of awareness building is through religion, where religious leaders of all faiths play a critical role in combating HIV/AIDS. They have been actively involved in Malaysia, spearheading efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination. For example, Friday sermons at mosques for Muslims, attended entirely by men in Malaysia, provides a strong platform to disseminate awareness messages, as well as messages on the equal responsibility that men have to women.

14. Women may contract HIV from sexual violence. Therefore, to provide greater protection for women, the Malaysian Penal Code was amended in 2006 to include penalties for husbands who subject their wives to unwanted sex. A husband who forces his wife to have unwanted sex with him can now face up to five years in jail.

Mr. Chairperson,

15. Advocating the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in preventing HIV/AIDS and providing care for people living with HIV/AIDS is a major priority on our national agenda. A concerted effort to address the needs, vulnerabilities and risks of women, including on gender inequalities that fuel the HIV epidemic shall continue. Our success at the national level will be the measure of our ability to fulfill our international commitments.

Thank you.