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STATEMENT

BY

**HON. MARLENE MUNGUNDA
MINISTER OF GENDER EQUALITY AND CHILD
WELFARE OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

AT THE

**53RD SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE
STATUS OF WOMEN**

**THE EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN
IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES AT ALL LEVELS**

AND

**THE EQUAL SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITIES BETWEEN
WOMEN AND MEN, INCLUDING CARE GIVING IN THE
CONTEXT OF HIV/AIDS”**

NEW YORK, 3-14 MARCH 2008

Chairperson

I wish to congratulate you, Mr. Chairperson, and the members of the Bureau for your able leadership in steering this Commission and above all for our continued commitment to Gender Equality and the empowerment of women

My delegation looks forward to fruitful outcomes of this Session. I assure you of my delegations full cooperation and support during this session.

Chairperson

Namibia aligns itself with the statement made by my colleague the South African Minister Manto Tshabalala Msimang on behalf of SADC and the statement made by Sudan on behalf of G77 and China.

Chairperson

Gender inequality has long been acknowledged as the cause for discrimination and violence against women and children. Namibia like many of our countries experiences uneven power relation between men and women in the political, economic and social spheres.

Namibia recognizes that educational choices and achievements affects and determines the employment opportunities of men and women alike, their individual and family well-being, and their place in society. Namibia truly believes that education is a Fundamental Right for girls as well as boys, women as well as men, on an equal basis, at all levels of Education. Namibia, therefore welcomes the “the Equal Participation of Women and Men in decision-making processes at all levels.”

Namibia has reached Gender Parity in the enrollment of male and female students in primary education as well as secondary education. For every 100 male there are 101 girls enrolled.

This means that these girls have equal access to basic education and are able to make informed decisions. In fact the Namibian Children's Parliament gives young men and women the opportunity to participate in decision making and allows them to be part of the discussion about their futures and to be informed about various social harms like human trafficking, sexual exploitation and HIV/AIDS.

Chairperson

As you have already learned from the statement made by my colleague on behalf of SADC the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development was signed by our Heads of State and Government in August last year. Member States are committed to scale up the achievement of the 50% target of women participation and representation in politics and decision making at all levels by 2015. Namibia has so far attained the 30,8% target of women representation in parliament and 33% in the public and private sector, 45% in local authority and 38% of all Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are owned by women. The Government of Namibia is working hard to achieving 50% representation by 2015.

We realize that the challenge is not only having the numbers but having the numbers that work for women's advancement. To this end the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare of the Republic of Namibia has embarked upon a programme that engages the Women Parliamentary Caucus, the Standing Parliamentary Committees on Human Resources and Community Development and Gender and Youth, to strengthening interaction between parliamentarians and service providers and communities on issues pertaining to Gender, Gender Based Violence, Reproductive Health rights including HIV and AIDS.

Chairperson

The high HIV infection rates coupled with scarce resources has resulted in families to provide informal care at home. The burden of care is squarely placed on women and girls. This is defined by traditional gender roles and stereotypes which eventually define the labour division between women and men. This has also resulted in the unequal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Elderly women especially are now emerging as new mothers for orphans and vulnerable children. To alleviate this burden Namibia runs a “foster care and maintenance grant” programme for orphans and other vulnerable children (OVCs). To date 102 000 orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC’s) are receiving financial assistance from Government to lessen the burden of care givers by supplementing their income in order to ensure that they have access to food, education and health care.

However, a considerable amount of young women and girls devote a significant amount of time and energy to care for sick members of their households and spend less or no time on school work. This leads to drop out of school with its social and economic consequences.

Chairperson

Community acceptance of men in the caregiver role runs counter to the norm and often drives them away from being active participants. As Governments we need to address the gender imbalance in provision of home based care. We need to recruit more male care facilitators through community sensitization meetings and use practicing male care facilitators as role models. Government is collaborating with men initiated NGOs such as Namibia Men for Change (NAMEC), White Ribbon Campaign to carry out gender awareness campaign, aimed at sharing of responsibilities, burdens and benefits between men and women.

Chairperson

Namibia also recognizes that increasing the sharing of domestic and care responsibilities between women and men is necessary, but not sufficient to address the growing challenges of care giving in society. There is a need for greater investment in Social Services through Private-Public Partnership. We also call on our Development Partners to support our initiatives in this sector.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that both male and female politicians in decision-making at all levels must aspire to meet the needs of men and women and boys and girls, equally.

I thank you