



THE PERMANENT MISSION OF  
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STATEMENT  
  
BY  
  
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DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENCE  
OF  
SOUTH AFRICA  
  
AT THE  
  
53<sup>RD</sup> SESSION  
OF THE  
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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*Please check against delivery*



Chairperson  
Honourable Ministers,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great honour that I take this opportunity to address the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

As South Africa enters its 15<sup>th</sup> year of democracy and prepares for its fourth general democratic elections, our country is taking stock of many of the accomplishments, challenges and lessons learnt with regard to building a democratic and non-sexist society. In this regard, we are examining our policies and practices in the area of equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in productive and reproductive life, as well as and the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels. South Africa has furthermore assessed current international debates drawing attention to the full spectrum of human vulnerabilities as they relate to women's lack of access to and control of resources, the impact of climate change, food security and the current financial crisis, as well as the threat of conflict, and the building of sustainable peace within the Continent and beyond. We welcome the announcement that the United States will ratify CEDAW. We thank the United States for the progressive move to be partners in the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Those who have been officially involved in these programmes will be ready to share their experiences in this area.

Having committed ourselves to the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995, we endeavour to make substantial progress in our society by implementing the commitments of the Beijing Platform of Action. From a legislative point of view, we have enacted a number of laws that protect women from discrimination, abuse and violence such as the Domestic Violence Act, Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, Maintenance Act, Marriage Act and the Sexual Offences Act, amongst others. South Africa has since the installation of a democratic government, been committed in seeing increased representation of women advancing in political leadership and decision-making. We have also developed legislation, policies and practices that advance women's economic status and opportunity.

Chairperson,

Women's employment chances in South Africa, which we seek to strengthen by the Employment Equity legislation and other employment and labour laws, further strengthen women's retention in the labour force. Although South Africa's Labour Relations Act puts workers' rights at the top of the agenda, there is a need to review the issue of maternity and paternity leave in line with the commitments we have made globally. We recognise that our society needs to address aspects pertaining to increasing the role men play in the lifecycle from pregnancy to the delivery of their babies, child-rearing, nurturing, bonding and in sharing of responsibilities for household chores.

Appropriate measures are needed to balance the daily burden of domestic responsibilities, the greatest share of which falls on women, and to truly recognise the unpaid work performed by women. We also believe that concrete recommendations and mechanisms are needed to ensure visible action with respect to breaking down gender stereotypes and ensuring the empowerment of women and men in providing home and community-based care.

Regarding the equal sharing of responsibilities, as well as care-giving in the context of communicable diseases, including HIV and AIDS, non-communicable diseases, trauma and

violence, South Africa is striving towards a more equitable approach to prevention, support and care, including nutrition, treatment and continued ethical research in consultation with women. My delegation wishes to urge the international community to invest more resources into basic science research. We also propose that more resources should be dedicated to research on affordable alternatives such as complementary and traditional medicines, as well as nutrition. We are particularly concerned about inadequate drug surveillance and pharmacovigilance capacity, especially in the African region. We therefore call upon our development partners to assist. Surely that must be our comprehensive and collective shared responsibility between men and women of conscience.

Chairperson,

South Africa's efforts to reach the target of 50 percent representation of women in decision-making positions has gained further impetus following the launch on 19 February 2009, of the 50/50 percent Campaign by 2015. This is in line with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Through this Campaign, political parties are urged to review their electoral lists in order to achieve gender parity. The intention is to ensure that we surpass the current 42 per cent representation of women in Cabinet and the 33 per cent of women in Parliament towards gender parity. This applies to the private sector and civil society as well. We must continue to support women, and capacitate them to ensure that they are retained in those positions.

As part of many detailed projects contained in the Government's Programme of Action, we will pay particular attention to facilitating the processes aimed at strengthening the machineries dealing with matters of gender equality through the establishment of a Women's Ministry to be located in the Presidency. This will ensure that the pinnacle of the National Gender Machinery remains situated in the highest level of Government that is well-resourced with defined authority.

Furthermore, we will continue to strengthen the capacity and mobilise resources that support gender equality and the empowerment of women. The public and private sector need to develop and enhance the capacity for the implementation of financing for women's empowerment programmes and gender equality. There is a need to strengthen and give priority to financing in order to further the advancement of women in all spheres of life.

The current global financial crisis highlights the need for greater participation for women in financial decision-making, acknowledging that the gender dimensions of the causes and consequences of the global financial crisis have thus far received little attention. The South African Government has initiated engagements with business and social partners to design mechanisms to retain jobs and mitigate the impact of the downturn. The challenge however, remains the effective involvement and benefits by women.

In conclusion Chairperson,

My delegation supports the deliberations regarding the priority theme of this session, specifically as it promotes and raise awareness of the role of women and men in all spheres of life, which supports key areas of economic growth, creates a policy environment as well as opportunities to support the development of women and men. Our vision is to create an enabling environment where women and men meaningfully participate in ensuring that the work in all sectors of society is valued.

I thank you