

**STATEMENT BY MR.S.S. AHLUWALIA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND  
MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION ON ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN  
(AGENDA ITEM 102), IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE FOURTH  
WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND OF THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL  
SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ENTITLED "WOMEN-2000: GENDER  
EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE FOR THE TWENTYFIRST CENTURY"  
(AGENDA ITEM 103) AT THIRD COMMITTEE OF 57<sup>TH</sup> UNGA ON OCTOBER 10,  
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Mr. Chairman,

In India, the important issue of empowerment of women, both economically and socially, has consistently received priority attention at all levels. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was adopted in 2001. The policy seeks to address and narrow the gaps between the *de jure* status and the *de facto* position of women, where such inequalities exist. It also seeks to mainstream a gender perspective into all laws, policies and programmes of the Government. We have often spoken of the 33 and 1/3 per cent reservation of electoral seats for women in the village panchayats [self-government at the village level] and municipal administrations, extending from the villages to the metropolitan cities. A national effort is now under way to work towards a similar reservation of seats for women in the national Parliament as well. Through legislative provisions, it has been ensured that heads of local self-government at the panchayat level, in municipalities and in city corporations will alternate between men and women; thus the mayor of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi today is a woman.

Empowerment of women is critical to the nation, as it benefits all sectors of political life and socio-economic development, including in education, health and protection of the environment. In this context, the report of the Secretary General on the issue of promoting the achievement

of the goal of gender equality through the strategy of gender mainstreaming is encouraging. There is a clearer consciousness and acceptance of the need to work towards achieving the goals and targets of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

I would like to comment on some of the other reports presented under the agenda items under consideration.

On the issue of elimination of crimes committed in the name of honour, in paragraph 28 of the Secretary General's report, reference is made to the comments of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions which states that Special Rapporteur "continued to receive reports of so-called honour killings of women, including from ---India ---". My delegation is of the firm belief that selective reproduction of unsubstantiated reports which are based on hearsay seriously affects the credibility and importance of the Secretary General's reports. No report of "so-called" honour killings in India had been transmitted to the Government of India by the Special Rapporteur as had been done with other alleged violations.

Let me state firmly and clearly that the practice of 'honour killings' does not exist in India. While saying this, I would like to affirm that the Government of India will not be found lacking in political will to

bring any perpetrator of such a crime to justice, if found in India.

Mr. Chairman,

We would like to thank the Working Group on the Future Operation of INSTRAW for their detailed report and their recommendations. The INSTRAW is an institution of the United Nations and responsibility for the critical situation of INSTRAW devolves on all member States. We expect that member States will come together to ensure that this institution does not flounder.

In the Secretary General's report on trafficking in women and girls, the importance of action at the national, regional and international levels has been emphasized. We are surprised at the reference made in para 48 to India, where UNIFEM is said to have "worked to ensure that the issue of trafficking is recognised". Again, such references are erroneous and misleading. In India, The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956 (ITPA) supplemented by the Indian Penal Code prohibits trafficking in human beings. Several other plans, programmes and measures are in place to deal with this serious issue. The National Commission for Women, a statutory body, has been performing crucial sensitisation functions in this and other areas. UNIFEM is presently working together with the National Human Rights Commission to study the causal and behavioural aspects of all agents in trafficking with an emphasis on qualitative vulnerability mapping. It is necessary to caution UN agencies, and that too particularly small ones in relation to the resource requirements for the gigantic tasks of their mandates for countries like India with large populations, against excessive activism in advocacy when they cannot match their aspirations with any resource commitments at the requisite level. This could affect their own credibility.

Trafficking in women and children is a global phenomenon with transnational implications. While national efforts to eliminate this social scourge with a vast international spread are essential, greater cohesive action among nations is called for. At the regional level, the SAARC states finalized the Convention on Trafficking recognising this as a priority area of action. The Protocol on Trafficking in persons, especially women and children, of the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, is expected to reinforce national efforts to address this problem.

We welcome the report of the Secretary General on the improvement of the status of women in the UN system and wish to urge that greater efforts be made to meet the targets set, the principal causes for non-attainment of which have been identified in the report. We wish to point out that the remedy for the situation should be found from within the system by taking effective steps to remove bottlenecks, particularly those listed in paragraph 56 of the report. We call upon the Secretary General to adopt a pro-active approach in this regard, to strive for tangible improvement in the situation, and reflect the same in the report to be presented next year.

Mr. Chairman,

Before concluding, I wish to make one final comment on the issue of violence against women. This is a stain that blots the world map. It respects no geographical or historical boundaries, and is found in all countries. It does not derive from cultural patterns or from tradition. It only differs in the quantum of the population that it affects, as reported by the WHO in its study. It is an affliction that must be removed, through increased sensitisation as well as by action and advocacy at the national level and through increased international co-operation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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