

STATEMENT BY MRS. RINI SOEROJO, ASSISTANT STATE MINISTER, MINISTRY OF STATE FOR THE ROLE OF WOMEN, ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA TO THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN ON THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT, HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN, THE GIRL CHILD

New York, 2 March 1998

---

Madam Chairperson,

I have the honour to address the Commission on the Status of Women on behalf of the States Members of the Group of 77 and China. I should like to first express our congratulations to you, Madam Chairperson, on your well deserved election and to the other members of the bureau on their respective election. I should also like to welcome the participation of the several experts in the panel discussions, which we believe will enrich the deliberations of the Commission on the four critical areas of concern.

Madam Chairperson,

The Group of 77 and China attach the utmost importance to full implementation of the Declaration and Platform for Action that were adopted in Beijing at the Fourth World Conference on Women. These documents offer the international community genuine prospects and real hope of achieving the goal of equality and full participation for women, and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all political, economic and social activities. We continue to view the multi-year programme of work adopted by the Commission as a positive framework for assessing the progress achieved in implementing the Platform for Action, and would like to commend the work undertaken on critical areas of concern during the forty-first session. Likewise, we attach considerable significance to the themes under consideration during this session: violence against women, women and armed conflict, human rights of women, and the girl child.

The Group of 77 and China express their serious concern with the injustices suffered by women; a problem mainly due to general lack of understanding which need further research to its root causes as well as its social and economic consequences. It is a problem which has for too long been ignored and must be recognized as a public issue requiring attention and action. It is a problem which perpetuates women's lower status in the family and in society, and that it is fostered by ignorance and inattention by society at large. Hence, it needs to be addressed in a holistic and comprehensive manner. If the international community and respective national governments are to gain insight on the true dimensions of this problem and begin to initiate effective programmes and strategies to overcome them, then clearly there needs to be a better collection of data and statistics on acts of violence against women, which are compiled in a format useful for policymakers in their efforts to find ways and means for appropriate solutions as well as clear international commitments on financial and technical assistance to developing countries, in accordance with the financial arrangements already outlined in the Platform for Action.

We do consider that while efforts to study and assess violence against women and to adopt preventive measures will necessarily have to be taken within the social and cultural norms of each country, nevertheless we wish to stress that violence against women in any form is unacceptable and that it constitutes a violation of human rights and must therefore be condemned. In this connection, particular concern should also be addressed to the continuing reports of grave abuses and acts of violence committed against women migrant workers. The issue of trafficking in women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation and prostitution in other countries also needs to be addressed. The international community, together with concerned Member States, should examine ways and means of ensuring their protection and preventing and eliminating such criminal acts.

The Group of 77 and China are fully supportive of incorporating within national plans of action a section to promote the protection of women against any form of violence. This should include a systematic and multifaceted approach that not only seeks to bring about legislative reform and the adoption of enforceable laws, but also greater awareness of this problem in all sectors of society. Women subjected to violence should be afforded the appropriate protection and have access to just and effective remedies. We consider that national plans should also address the need for training of relevant personnel and the adoption of appropriate measures in education systems, as well as the development of advocacy strategies on gender based violence. The important role of education as a means of preventing violence against women cannot be overstated.

While violence against women is prevalent in many societies, it becomes increasingly stark in conditions of armed conflict where grave violations of the human rights of women have been perpetrated. The international community is all too aware of the murder, torture and systematic rape of women that has been employed as a tactic of war and terrorism. Moreover, the reality that women constitute approximately 80 per cent of the world's refugee and displaced person population underscores the tragic consequences that armed conflict has on women in particular.

The Group of 77 and China fully endorse the increased participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels. In that regard, women should have equal opportunity within the United Nations to contribute to the achievement of global peace and security. Likewise, the role of women at decision-making levels in national and international institutions dedicated to peace-keeping, preventive diplomacy and related matters should be strengthened.

The Group of 77 and China believe that in areas of armed conflict greater effort needs to be made to ensure that international humanitarian and human rights law is upheld. Moreover, that the international community and national institutions should enhance their capabilities to determine the context of violence against women in armed conflict, the violation of the human rights and humanitarian law of women under foreign occupation, and take appropriate action and address the long-term health needs of women affected by armed conflict.

Madam Chairperson,

The unequal situation of women and the disproportionate manner in which they must deal with adversity, poverty, and threats to their well-being ultimately falls within the framework of human rights and the failure to achieve full realization of women's rights.

The Group of 77 and China reaffirm the urgent need for the full promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, which is essential for the advancement of women. To better achieve that goals, both women and men must be better informed about their rights through comprehensive human rights education programmes, as highlighted by General Assembly resolution 49/184 proclaiming the "Decade on Education in the area of Human rights." We therefore consider the strengthening of national institutions for the promotion and protection of women's human rights to be necessary.

The Group of 77 and China would underline that the existence of widespread extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of all human rights. Poverty marginalizes women and results in continuing discrimination and inequality. The negative impact of globalization and the global economic system, which seriously impacted many developing countries and threaten to permanently marginalize some have not only victimized, but also worsened the conditions and situation of women's well-being.

The Group of 77 and China hold that the full and effective enjoyment of human rights by women can never be achieved in the absence of sustainable economic growth and a supportive social and international order. And, while the primary responsibility for the promotion and protection of the economic and social rights of

women rests at the national level, it is clear that national action will only be effective in a supportive international environment. International financial institutions and intergovernmental organizations should therefore review and revise policies not only ensuring that their programmes benefit women, but also share the financial requirements for the anti-poverty strategies of national governments.

The Group of 77 and China would like to stress the importance of adopting pro-active policies and for mainstreaming into the United Nations system a gender perspective in all policies and programmes designed to realize economic and social rights. In particular, in such areas as those concerning macro-economic questions, operational activities for development, poverty eradication, human rights and humanitarian assistance, and peace and security. We likewise consider it necessary for national governments to initiate similar mainstreaming activities in all their development policies and programmes, so as to promote the economic and social rights of women at all levels.

The Group of 77 and China similarly agree that specific goals should be established to enhance the situation of the girl child and to improve their conditions of health, nutrition and education. Recognizing that children represent societies most valuable resource, no nation can accept conditions which squander that resource and which place children at risk. Intervention programmes should be adopted at national levels relevant to the specific conditions of each country, which reinforce international human rights standards for girls. The Group continues to support the Platform for Action, which represents a recognition of the specific needs of the girl child to be placed at the forefront of national and international agendas, and to promote an enabling environment for their healthy development. In particular, Governments should direct their attention to situations of abuse and sexual exploitation, and to the situation of adolescent girls in need of specific protection. The Group of 77 considers that at the international level the legal framework exists for the protection and development of children, and that the relevant instruments should be adhered to at national levels. In this context the provision of specific health-care for women during all situations of their life-span, since new born, adolescence, child bearing, middle age till elderly, also deserves serious consideration.

The Group of 77 and China welcome the fact that many countries have already adopted or are in the process of adopting national plans of action to encourage and ensure follow-up implementation and monitoring at national level. We would underline the necessity and value of such plans as essential to the review and appraisal to be held in the year 2000.

Madam Chairperson,

In concluding, it is apparent from the considerable amount of material prepared by the Commission and from the papers submitted on the critical areas of concern that there is a common course of action that needs to be followed. We need to have a better assessment and monitoring capability to measure our progress and define the obstacles. Each country, reflecting its culture, traditions and values, should adopt legislation that protects the rights of women and girls and offers them opportunities in society. We need to recognize the value of education as a means of creating awareness and improving the status of women in society. Most important is the ultimate and imperative need to alleviate and eradicate the poverty which forces women into a lower status and severely handicaps their ability to advance in political, economic and social life.

Thank you.