

# Statement by the Chairman of the Group of 77, Ambassador Milos Alcalay (Venezuela) at the opening of the 46th session of the Commission on the Status of Women

New York, 4 March 2002

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Madame Chairperson,

On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I'd like to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau for your election. You can count on the readiness and willingness of the Group to cooperate with you during your tenure and to work in a dedicated and constructive manner in order to arrive at a successful conclusion during the present session of the Commission.

I would also like to take the opportunity to express our gratitude to the Secretariat for their dedicated work and professionalism in the preparation of the documents that will serve as basis for our discussions.

Madame Chairperson,

The adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and of the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly constituted an overall process that allowed the international community to address various challenges, trends and patterns affecting the status of women whose causes and consequences may vary from country to country. During the Fourth World Conference on Women and its review process the ways of further empowerment of women were at the center of the collective endeavors of the international community in this domain.

The Group of 77 and China is of the view that despite the progress made thus far on these endeavors, there exist serious challenges and obstacles that yet remain to be thoroughly addressed and effectively overcome.

Poverty eradication continues to be one of those challenges. Globalization and the transformations in the world economy associated with it have had a profound impact on the parameters of social development, and in many instances has worsened the situation of poverty in which millions of people live around the world, particularly in developing countries. One of the most significant trends of this process has been the increased poverty of women. In this context, the empowerment of women should be understood as one of the central means through which the eradication of poverty can be achieved.

Empowerment of women implies, as the Secretary General points out, the transformation of power relations by which women move from being objects within relationships of subordination to becoming subjects, controlling their own lives. The insertion of women in income generating activities contributes in the improvement of the standards of living of their families and thus to the creation of new opportunities that might have a positive impact on poverty eradication efforts.

We would like to highlight at this juncture, the importance of the recognition made by the Draft Consensus of Monterrey, to be adopted by the Conference on Financing for Development, of the need that exists to "promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and diseases and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable".

Madame Chairperson,

For the Group of 77 and China, poverty eradication throughout the life cycle in the context of a globalized world is an issue of great interest. It is well known the difficulties that developing countries experience in the face of a liberalized economic context. The Secretary General has illustrated this in his report when he asserts

that an analysis of the recent experiences of many countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and Latin America indicate that there is no linear relationship between economic liberalization and increased economic growth, development and reduced poverty.

In the light of the deliberations on the Programme of Action on Ageing, that will be adopted in Madrid, Spain during the Second World Assembly on Ageing, the G77 and China has great interest in examining the situation of older women in the face of poverty. It is a fact, as indicated by the Secretary General, that demographic changes have resulted in an increasing number of elderly women, a large number of them living in poverty. The G77 and China has great interest in the discussions that the Commission will hold on this issues, and hopes that particular attention will be given to the eradication of poverty among older women so that the conclusions in this regard will constitute an input to the negotiations of the Programme of Action on Ageing.

Madame Chairperson,

The increasing occurrence of natural disasters in the 1980's led the United Nations general Assembly to proclaim the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in 1989. This was followed up by the Yokohama Plan of Action for a Safer World in 1994. To paraphrase the Secretary General in his Message on International Women's Day: "the Millennium Declaration has also given us an overriding mission for the twenty-first century... [to] work for freedom from fear, freedom from want, and protection of the resources of this planet... putting people at the centre of everything we do.

Madame Chairperson,

It is a matter of great concern for the Group of 77 and China that the past ten years have seen the developing world take the brunt of the casualties as well as structural and ecological damage of natural disasters, which, by and large, are often associated with human behaviour and settlement patterns.

The increasing frequency of small to medium-impact disasters, such as floods or landslides, as well as slow onset disasters such as drought and land degradation also claims more of the attention of the international community, though it has yet to be adequately addressed. There are indications, according to the Secretary General, to the effect that the losses and costs related to these so-called "smaller" disasters might even exceed those associated with larger but more infrequent ones.

In the past decade all disasters have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and affected hundreds of millions more. The circumstances leading to the events, as well as their aftermaths are of such complexity that the need for a multidisciplinary approach soon became apparent. With this recognition, the importance of a gender perspective to the mitigation of natural disasters also quickly jumped to the fore.

The Yokohama Plan of Action formally recognized this important aspect of the multidisciplinary approach when it called upon States to stimulate community involvement and the empowerment of women and emphasized the importance of incorporating women in all stages of disaster management programmes.

Later, the Beijing Plan of Action underlined the impact of environmental disasters on women and recognized that the issue called for greater investigation. Beijing Plus Five identified natural disasters and epidemics as emerging issues and noted that the social and economic impact of natural disasters and epidemics still remains in the background from a policy point of view, particularly as regards the status of women and the achievement of equality between men and women.

Gender perspectives in the context of disaster mitigation have been focused mainly from the point of view of vulnerability or community involvement, whereas Women's ability to take an active part in disaster prevention and mitigation of hazards, as well as their role in the coping and recovery stages, have not been

taken sufficiently into account.

Madame Chairperson,

It has now been recognized that managing and reducing risks is crucial to avoid worsening levels of disaster occurrence and loss both in terms of lives as well as material, particularly in developing countries affected by regularly occurring small-scale disasters at the local level, and it is in this context that the critical role of authorities and communities, as well as civil society, in reducing disaster occurrence and loss becomes most apparent.

Risk reduction involves the introduction of measures to avoid or limit the adverse effects of natural hazards. Though gender is a critical aspect in the disaster process, there is to this day very little literature regarding the integration of gender concerns into risk reduction and environment management.

The Group of 77 and China is concerned by the persistent large gaps in the international community's knowledge regarding the links between gender, environmental management and disaster risk reduction at all levels, from climate change to local small emergencies. Where knowledge exists, there is little coordinated application of research results at the national and international levels, particularly as regards climate change, desertification and drought.

The existing documentation on gender and disasters tends to focus almost exclusively on impact and response, leaving large gaps regarding the issue of prevention. Furthermore, there is a marked dearth of sex-disaggregated data on disaster and environmental management and what little there is has yet to be widely disseminated so as to be available and accessible to policy-makers.

Madame Chairperson,

As stated in the Secretary General's Report, social vulnerability is determined by a combination of many factors, not the least of which are hazard awareness, the condition of human settlements and infrastructure, legal systems and public policy. The past decade has shown that the poorest sectors of society face greater exposure to risk, given their poor housing, vulnerable location and limited access to information. The most marginalized, including small producers (in many cases women) and female headed households are often the worst affected among the poor.

Madam Chairperson,

The Group of 77 and China agrees with the Secretary General in that effective risk reduction calls for the interlinkage between sound environmental management and sustainable development. Disaster risk management must be part of an overall development process in the context of a cross-sectoral and gender-sensitive approach, and thus takes note of the recommendations contained in his Report to our Commission.

The Group of 77 and China however, is of the opinion that more attention should be given to the international aspects of disaster prevention as well as the coping and recovery stages in the aftermath of natural catastrophes. Though Each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development, and the role of national policies and development strategies cannot be overemphasised, more often than not, disasters, particularly so-called small disasters, affect entire regions of the globe and are thus outside the power or capacity of any one national government to prevent or mitigate.

Of particular importance are the devastating effects of debt upon developing countries', particularly the least developed countries', ability to incorporate comprehensive disaster mitigation strategies into their overall development plans as well as their ability to cope and recover in the aftermath of a particular catastrophe or during a prolonged emergency.

In this regard, the Group of 77 and China would like to remind the commission of the Resolution presented by the Group before the Plenary for the past couple of years on “INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE FIELD OF NATURAL DISASTERS, FROM RELIEF TO DEVELOPMENT”

The Group of 77 and China will also be presenting a Draft Resolution before our Commission on the situation of Palestinian women based on the Secretary General’s Report contained in document E/CN.6/2001/3.

Once again, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I would like to reiterate our wishes for the success of the delicate task ahead of you, as well as to offer our own best efforts to that effect.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.

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