

**Statement by H.E. U Wunna Maung Lwin, Ambassador and
Permanent Representative of the Union of Myanmar and
Leader of the Myanmar Delegation to the 42nd Session of the
Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
(3 November 2008)**

Madam Chair,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

At the outset, I would like to extend our warmest congratulations to you on your assumption as the Chairmanship of this session. My delegation is convinced that, under your able guidance, this constructive dialogue will come to a successful conclusion and bear fruitful results. I pledge the fullest cooperation of my delegation. I also wish to offer our warmest felicitations to the other members of the Committee.

On behalf of the delegation of Myanmar and on my own, I would like to express our appreciation to you for having invited us to the Forty-second session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at the time Myanmar's combined second and third periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention is being considered.

Madam Chair,

Firstly, I would like to state that, as expressed in the combined report, the Government of Myanmar is given top priority to the elimination of

discrimination against women by implementing the Convention since Myanmar acceded the Convention on 22 July 1997. As a state party, Myanmar has placed its utmost efforts and steadfastly implemented a series of national level plans for the well-being of the women. In the course of Myanmar's history, Myanmar women have been enjoying equal rights with men and their rights are being protected by Myanmar custom as well as by existing laws. The objective of our mission in the advancement of women is in line with the Convention that is to place dignity to the forefront through the promoting and protecting of human rights.

Before going into details on the realization of the rights of women in my country, I would like to elaborate some of the positive developments currently unfolding in Myanmar. Myanmar people have taken the most important step toward the transition of the democratic society by overwhelmingly voting in favour to adopt the new State Constitution. The National Referendum was successfully held on 10 and 24 May 2008. 92.48 per cent of the eligible voters totaling to 24.8 million have voted in favour to adopt the new State Constitution.

The provisions relating to the fundamental rights including the equal rights of women and duties of the citizens are clearly enshrined in the new State Constitution. It ensures the Myanmar women will continue to have full privilege to enjoy these rights equally. Chapter 8 of the State Constitution provides Rights and Responsibilities of the Citizens and ensures that any citizen will not be subject to discrimination regardless of race, native, religion, position, status, culture, gender or financial status. After adoption of the new State Constitution by the National Referendum, we have successfully completed the 4th Step of the Seven-step Road Map and the multi-party democracy general election, the 5th

step will be held in 2010. Currently, necessary measures are being undertaken for the preparation of the elections.

Madam Chair,

Allow me to present the drafting process of this Second and Third Combined Reports. This report was prepared by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement as being a focal ministry for advancement of women, in consultation with the representatives of the related ministries to the CEDAW Committee as well as relevant non-governmental organizations such as Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAF), Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), Myanmar Women Sports Federation (MWAF) and Myanmar Women Entrepreneur Association (MWEA).

As a report-drafting mechanism, the focal Ministry has formed a Report Drafting Committee comprised of twenty five members representing from the relevant ministries and NGOs. Afterward, the Committee set up a core group to collect update data and information effectively. After several meetings and issuing the first and second draft report, the Committee circulated to concerned departments for comments, suggestion and confirmations. The third draft was forwarded to the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs for careful consideration. Subsequently, the fourth and final draft was presented to the Foreign Affairs Policy Committee of the Government of the Union of Myanmar for approval and the report was approved by the Government.

Madam Chair,

Myanmar women can enjoy equal rights with men traditionally. In order to promote and protect the rights of women and girls, the Government has established Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA) in 1996 as a national machinery to carry out Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. In addition, Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWAFF) was established in 20 December 2003 to take effective measures of women's affairs in implementing the principles and guidelines laid down by the MNCWA. The Women's Affairs organizations were formed in all States and Divisions down to the grass-roots level to carry out the activities in order to promote its functions comprehensively and widely for the advancement of women and to enhance cooperation with national and international non-governmental organizations. The President, the Vice-President and the General Secretary of MWAFF are members of the MNCWA. Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation has laid down seven objectives for protection and advancement of women and it comprised of six departments and six working groups.

Furthermore, for the promotion of health and well-being of mothers and children, the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) has been established since 1991. Regarding economic empowerment of women in Myanmar, Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs' Association (MWEA) was formed in 1995. In addition to that, the Myanmar Women Sports Federation (MWSF) was founded in 1991 with the aims of promoting the participation of women in sports and the physical, mental and moral development of women.

Madam Chair,

In Myanmar, women constituted 50.3 per cent of the total population and they are protected by culture, religion and existing laws, such as Penal Code and the Suppression of Prostitution Act of 1994.

According to the National Action Plan adopted in March 2002, the sub committee on violence against women of MNCWA has implemented various activities, such as organizing educative talks on violence against women, opening counseling centres, receiving complaint letters and disseminating laws that protect women through media. Since 2003, MWAF has undertaken to review the complaints and renders assistance to victims of domestic violence to bring perpetrators to justice.

In Myanmar, whoever commits sexual violence, including rape, against women and girls shall be punished according to existing laws. For the crime committed by the law enforcement and military personnel, verdicts are more stringent as they shall be prosecuted in accordance with the Police Disciplinary Law, military rules and regulations, and also with the Penal Code.

Madam Chair,

For violence against women and trafficking, MWAF had conducted awareness raising programmes all over the country. The members of MWAF are actively participating in family tracing, rehabilitation and reintegration programme by welcoming the returnees at the border areas and providing social supports and assisting in sending them back home.

In November this year, MWAF has planned to give a training of trainers for protection against trafficking in person in cooperation with UNIAP and IOM. The aim is to equip the members at state and divisional levels with the scale in conducting family tracing, assessment and in providing assistance to the victims.

With regards to the women victims who suffered from the Cyclone Nargis, the members of MWAF have been providing food, clothing and shelter as well as micro finance and participating in the women's protection situation analysis in the cyclone-hit areas so as to carry out the National Plan for protection of women.

Madam Chair,

Myanmar views trafficking in persons as a grave issue confronting human being. To this purpose, the Government of Myanmar has been seriously addressing the issue through a comprehensive framework which includes national legislation, a National Plan of Action, high-level commitment, bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation. Since 1997, the Government has been realizing the matter as one of our national priorities and implementing in accordance with national policy.

Myanmar became a state party to the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, so called Palermo Convention in 2004. It reflected that Myanmar has political will and commitment to combat human trafficking in cooperation with the international community, following with the signing of regional MoUs, such as Australian sponsored Asia Regional Trafficking in

Persons (ARTIP) and Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiatives Against Trafficking (COMMIT) which comprises of six countries from Greater Mekong Sub-region. In addition, Myanmar is actively participating as a member country of ASEAN and BIMSTEC in the fight against trafficking.

It has enacted specific Law on TIP in 2005 in complying with Palermo Convention, relevant conventions and UN recommended principles and guidelines on Human Rights and Anti-human Trafficking. It is used as legal tool ensuring justice to the victims and denied impunity for the perpetrators. Very recently, Myanmar Government approved the ASEAN Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters for ratification in the year 2008. According to this treaty, member countries could be able to address transnational crimes successfully through mutual assistance request and provincial arrest request processes.

Various National Mechanisms were set up in early 2006 and followed with adoption of comprehensive National Plan of Action which is now implementing in cooperation with local NGOs, UN agencies and INGOs effectively. According to the Biannual Progress Report of Work Plan for 2008, the Government and Local NGOs have spent over U.S \$ 1.6 million while the UN and INGOs have spent U.S \$ 1.5 million on anti-trafficking measures in the first six months.

Myanmar has developed national mechanism for return, rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficking victims under the leadership of Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement in collaboration with relevant departments and organizations such as Myanmar Women Affairs Federation, UNICEF, and UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking, World Vision, Save the Children,

IOM and AFXB. In order to strengthen bilateral partnership with destination countries, such as China and Thailand in addressing the issue with a more comprehensive way, Myanmar is in a process of developing bilateral MoUs.

Myanmar gives special protection to women which can be seen in TIP Law. For example, Section 4(b) of TIP Law states that "in preventing and suppressing trafficking in persons to pay particular attention to women and children." Also, Chapter VI devotes special protection of women and children trafficking victims.

Madam Chair,

With regards to the health sector, the Ministry of Health is taking the responsibility of providing promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services to raise the health status of the population, while implementing the social objectives lay down by the State, and in accordance to the National Health Policy. In Myanmar, mothers and children constituting over 60 percent of the total population are the vulnerable groups. Therefore maternal and child health care services are provided both in urban and rural setting all over the country and it is included as one of the crucial components of the National Health Plan. Conventional maternal and child health care programme was reformulated as Reproductive Health Care Programme in 1996 using the life-span approach, in which safe motherhood was incorporated as one of the major elements. MOH has been implementing all these programmes with the assistance and support from the WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF, bilateral agencies and in collaboration with many international NGOs, national NGOs and voluntary organizations.

As Myanmar women and children are used to getting maternal and child health care package including pregnancy, safe delivery, post natal care and newborn care thus child health care has been in-cooperated with mother's health since pregnancy and childbirth. A midwife attending a pregnant mother has to provide care for children with immunization service, growth monitoring, nutrition promotion, improving personal hygiene and prevention of infectious diseases together with the mothers. Reproductive Health programme has established better coordination with National HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases Control Programme for prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS, Child and Adolescent Health project and Women and Child Health Development project and Gender and Women's Health project for the betterment of mothers, adolescents and children in the country.

Maternal Mortality Ratio, Infant Mortality Rate and Under Five Mortality Rates are in declining stage yet there still need to strengthen maternal and child health care services in order to achieve MDG goals 4 and 5. Accessibility due to geographical and weather conditions of the remote areas is one of the challenges to overcome in implementing these goals. The Government is receiving very modest amount of international assistance for the medicines, equipments and human resources trainings. We can overcome these challenges in a short period of time if we receive full privileges as other developing countries are enjoying.

In order to combat HIV/AIDS problems all over the country, in achieving the MDG goal 6, National AIDS Programme has been working in collaboration with (8) UN Agencies, (26) International NGOs, (9) National NGOs and two Governmental Institutions for prevention and care services in a gender oriented approach as the priority target groups for such activities are women and youth.

Myanmar Maternal and Child Health Association (MMCWA) plays a significant role in the provision of maternal and child health care services through out the country, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health.

Madam Chair,

The primary goal of education policy is to ensure universal access to education and to establish a continually learning society. To meet this end, measures were undertaken by the department concerned and NGOs to enhance enrolment and retention rate of all children. Basic functional literacy programs through non-formal education methods have also been undertaken in all States and Divisions including border areas. Equitable education opportunities have been created for all the national races residing both in rural and border areas in accordance with the national plan. As a result, in 2008, adult literacy rate increased up to 94.83 per cent in which women constituted 95.07 per cent. Furthermore, in secondary level, the girl enrolment rate was 49.3 per cent in both rural and urban areas. Out of these, the enrolment rate of girls in rural areas was 49 per cent. In tertiary level, the enrolment rate of girls in 2005-2006 academic year was 58.5 per cent. Therefore, these data clearly indicates the progress of the capacity of Myanmar women in education sector.

For continuing education Community Learning Centers as well as Reading Circles have been established through out the country. For the enhancement of ICT education for women the government has also encouraging collaboration with the private sector. In addition, vocational trainings were held in collaboration with UN agencies and NGOs to equip women with skills for income generation.

In Myanmar's education system, there is no discrimination between boys and girls and they are treated equally. In the basic education system, 81 percent of teachers are women therefore they are taking major roles in basic education sector. The number of girls and boys in basic education is almost equal. Hence, they have equal access to basic education. On the other hand, the Government is presently giving more incentives to male students in medical sciences in order to take up duties in the rural health development in far-flung areas.

Madam Chair,

The Government of the Union of Myanmar is ensuring the privileges of workers' rights. The Ministry of Labour administrates the enforcement of existing labour laws to ensure the rights of workers in Myanmar in accord with international labour standards. The workers have the rights to bargain individually or collectively. In practice, such bargaining on trade disputes are being settled in the way of negotiation by the respective Township Labour Supervisory Committee, in which an official of the Ministry of Labour serves as secretary, before the employer/ manager and workers concerned as tripartism. All the workers in Myanmar are enjoying their rights concerning the working hours, rest hours, overtime, weekly/ public holidays in accord with the existing labour laws under the administration of the Ministry of Labour.

Moreover, the protective and preventive measures concerning the rights of women at work are also mentioned in existing Labour Laws of the Ministry of Labour. It has also included the rights of the women such as the working hours, the weekly rest, the holiday with pay, leaves and holidays and occupational safety and health and social welfare.

Madam Chair,

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is the focal Ministry for not only children and women but also elderly and persons with disabilities. The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is carrying out preventive, protective and rehabilitative measures for vulnerable groups such as children, youth, women, disabled persons and older people in collaboration with UN Agencies and INGOs. Concerning the trafficked women and children, the Department is carrying out the programmes on repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration in line with the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law (2005).

Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar on the 2nd and 3rd May 2008. The lives and properties of the people were lost and damaged. As stated in the Post Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) report, the official death toll was 84,537 with 53,836 people missing, and 19,359 injured. According to the assessment data 2.4 million people were severely affected by the cyclone, out of an estimated 7.35 million people living in the affected townships

The Government of Myanmar has established the National Disaster Preparedness Central Committee since 2004. There are 10 sub committees for relief, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. After Cyclone Nargis attack, Tripartite Core Group (TCG) which consists of Government of Myanmar, UN and ASEAN was formed to smoothly carry out the tasks of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Moreover, various clusters including cluster for the protection of Children and Women were also formed.

Currently, assessment surveys on women, elderly and persons with disabilities are being conducted by DSW in collaboration with UN Agencies,

NGOs and INGOs. The responsibility of this group is to draw up Plans of Action on Women, Older People and Disabled Persons to be implemented especially in the storm-hit areas. The Plan of Action on Children in Emergency has already been established.

Madam Chair,

Under the above-mentioned circumstances, I should like to affirm the Committee that the Government of Myanmar has made every effort by given priority and encouragements to the development of the Myanmar women which is flourishing in line with the historical and cultural traditions for its further advancement. In encouraging the development of the women sector, efforts are being made for women to be able to enjoy their rights fully to ensure that women are not deprived of their opportunities.

Before concluding, my delegation would like to reaffirm that Government of Myanmar is committed to work for the full realization of the rights of the women in my country. My delegation remains ready to engage in the constructive dialogue with the distinguished members of the Committee and to cooperate with them in achieving the objectives for the advancement of women in my country.

I thank you.