

Statement
by
Her Excellency Zenebu Tadesse,
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of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
on
the Presentation of the sixth and seventh periodic report of the Federal Democratic
Republic of Ethiopia under Article 18 of the International Convention on the
Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

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Madame Chairperson and Distinguished members of the Committee,

Allow me at the outset to express my delegation's appreciation at this constructive dialogue with distinguished members of the Committee on the presentation of Ethiopia's sixth and seventh combined periodic report under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The Ethiopian delegation is composed of officials from the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Federal Court.

Since the submission of Ethiopia's fourth and fifth periodic report of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, with its limited resources, has taken several measures to ensure gender equality and the protection of women's right under CEDAW, including other international instruments as well as its national laws. Various affirmative measures and major policy enforcement mechanisms have been introduced and put in place in an effort to advance women's socio-economic and political status in the country.

Similarly, the Government of Ethiopia has taken several positive steps to build its capacity to meet its international human rights reporting obligations. It has done so by, among other measures, fostering and promoting closer cooperation with relevant local and international institutions. One such key institution has been the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) - East Africa Regional Office with which the Government of Ethiopia has established a very effective and exemplary relationship and cooperation.

In this regard, I would like to express the appreciation of my government to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights - East African Regional Office - for the technical and financial support it has so generously provided in the preparation of this report.

This exemplary cooperation between the Ethiopian government and the OHCHR has immensely contributed to completion and presentation of Ethiopia's overdue reports under various international and regional human rights instruments, namely the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention against torture and other Cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment (CAT), Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and Universal Periodic Review (UPR) which the state has already submitted to concerned treaty bodies. Ethiopia has got reviewed its reports under (CERD), (CAT), (UPR), (ACHPR) and the ICCPR. Moreover, Ethiopia has also undertaken a successful assessment of its human right performance under the UPR, and accepted a considerable number of recommendations, which, has a direct and indirect impact on the protection and promotion of the rights of women.

And also two of the delegates here with other colleagues from Ethiopia have just presented the Ethiopian initial report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and had a fruitful discussion with the Human Rights Committee in Geneva.

Madame Chairperson and members of the committee

The methodology used in the preparation of this report has been both participatory and comprehensive. It has strictly followed the latest reporting guidelines of the Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women, and duly taken care of the concerns which the Committee had raised in its concluding observations on the country's last periodic report. This Report has benefited a lot from the enormous amount of information and data gathered from different governmental (federal and regional) and non-governmental organizations. In addition, civil society organizations and academic

institutions have also participated in a number of consultations prior to the preparation and finalization of the report and contributed their inputs in creating a wider awareness of the public at large. A national inter-ministerial, legal experts and drafting committee that were established for the preparation of the report helped tremendously to improve the combined report.

The report is complemented by the common core document which I believe the distinguished members of this committee had the opportunity to consider. As stated in the core document, Ethiopia is a federal state governed by constitutions both at the federal and regional level. In this regard, I would like to point out that the promulgation of the 1995 Federal Constitution was a turning point in terms of recognition and implementation of women's right in Ethiopia. Inspired by international human rights standards, the Constitution has enshrined almost all basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. It has also a specific provision concerning the rights of women under Article 35.

The Constitution incorporates the principles of equality of women and non discrimination. These principles resonate across all the relevant federal and regional laws, including the revised federal Family Code, Labor and nationality-oriented legislations. The government has been exerting its utmost efforts on eliminating discrimination against women in every sector. And, through a variety of measures, it has broadened the scope by providing protection against discriminatory acts born out of of gender bias. The development and change package of Ethiopian women ensures equal participation of all women in every sector and the National Poverty Reduction Strategy. The strategy recognizes that women have legitimate stake in the country's overall development. Some of the concrete steps taken by the government to enhance women's right in the country deserve mention.

It cannot be denied that violence against women has been a deep- rooted problem in Ethiopia due to gender inequality sanctioned by patriarchal cultural legacies and traditional norms. Women have suffered violence at home, schools, offices and other

public places. Yet, for many, reporting male violence to law enforcement agencies has been considered taboo. Moreover, the law enforcement bodies have not been trained properly to handle such cases. However, the adoption of the new Criminal Code and gender sensitization programs has helped to mitigate those problems and have brought important changes in this regard.

The adoption of the new Criminal Code in 2005 that contains strong and comprehensive measures in support of women's rights and interests has been useful additions. It has played and still playing a major role in ensuring and protecting women's right as a whole. No less important are the special prosecution and investigation units set up by the government. These units are mandated to investigate and prosecute criminal acts committed against women as well as counseling and handling civil cases of needy victims. All these measures are contributing a great deal in the endeavor to promote and protect of women's rights. Moreover, a gender-sensitive victim-friendly court has also been established.

In consequence, the rate of convictions of perpetrators is increasing from time to time. The government has also put in place mechanism to take administrative and judicial measures against law-enforcement and other officials who fail to take appropriate action against discrimination and violence against women in accordance with the country's various legislations. The government is also in the process of developing a national strategy and action-plan to prevent and combat harmful traditional practices as well as gender violence.

Madame Chairperson and members of the committee

Many awareness-creation activities have been carried out to eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence against women with the collaboration of various stakeholders. The government's public awareness-raising campaigns on the need to eliminate discriminatory traditional stereotypes, prejudices and the important roles and responsibilities that women have in society has brought about substantial changes. In addition to positive attitudinal changes, awareness-raising has helped to totally eradicate some harmful traditional practices against women. In line with this, conventions related to human rights issues are widely disseminated to the population translated in different local languages. Competitions program in schools and on televisions and radio are held to popularize conventions and declarations related to human rights and issues of concerns that affect equality, peace and human dignity.

There is a parallel development that deserves mention. The Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs and with the support of international institutions, has provided training to judges, prosecutors, police officers on women's rights advocates on how to handle cases of discrimination and violence against women. Likewise, training has been provided on gender-related conventions and other related domestic legal documents. The training was given to women working in women affairs departments at each ministry, regional bureaus as well as those working in governmental offices at the federal and regional levels.

Although a lot remains to be done to change the longstanding misperceptions and stereotypes imbedded in the cultural practices of the society, the multi-dimensional activities carried out so far, has brought major changes in the realization of women's rights.

Even though the Ethiopian economy is one of the fastest growing in the world, there is still rural-urban and overseas migration in search of better life. This is more preponderant among women. Unfortunately many young women have fallen victim of illegal trafficking, notably in the Middle East. Ethiopia has made great effort to combat this crime at the national and regional levels. The Federal Constitution specifically stipulates

an explicit prohibition against human trafficking. A broad-spectrum of new provisions penalizing acts of trafficking in women and children were also included in the new criminal law.

The government is working hand in hand with stakeholders in order to create public awareness on human trafficking. Human trafficking is given particular emphasis and a wide range of coverage on the media, particularly on the TV and Radio, by letting victims themselves to speak about their experience voluntarily with the participation of the Government, NGO's and Gender Network groups to sensitize the public at large.

Measures are already being taken in collaboration with local NGOs, Labor attaches and numerous consulates in providing trainings for federal and regional law enforcement officials to help them better, assist victims. Bilateral and multilateral agreements have been signed with neighboring countries which plays a vital role in preventing human trafficking and smuggling. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is also active in providing training to private employment agencies, including pre-departure orientation and counseling services to migrant workers. It also has an authority to monitor the activities of these employment agencies and even suspend their licenses if they are involved in illegal activities related to trafficking.

Moreover, the Charities and Societies Proclamation reserves the right to engage in some activities, including activity in the area of gender equality to endogenous Charities and Societies alone. The main reason is because such objectives involve advocacy and legislation, which can only be enforced through active participation and commitment of citizens without the involvement of foreign funding. Foreign funding in this domain, we believe, does more harm than good. Its inevitable result is worshipping foreign dependence and also failure in the pursuit of domestic agenda and this is critical for effective internally driven democratic transformation of the country. Allegations that the CSO law negatively impacts NGO's working on issues of women's right are unfounded. Today more than ever, greater numbers of local Women Societies and Charities working in the areas of women's rights have been registered and operating. Unimpeded by any

restriction, these gender-based NGOs are providing great service in the protection and promotion of women's rights in Ethiopia.

Madame Chairperson and members of the committee

Political participation of women in Ethiopia has been increasing during the past two decades. In an effort to encourage women to take full part in the political life of the country, special attention has been given to empower women in all spheres and assume decision-making posts at all levels of governance. For example, in the four elections that Ethiopia has held since 1995, encouraging progress has been achieved. In the 1st election out of 547 seats in the Federal Parliament, only 13 members (2.38%) was held by women, which during the 2010 election reaches 152 member (27.8%). Women are also elected more in Regional councils and local governments.

The application of provisional measures like affirmative action has been encouraging in that it is elevating women to important public office positions through recruitments, transfers and promotions. Women are also benefiting from capacity-building trainings. In addition, different types of scholarship programs have been offered by government and non-government organizations to upgrade the educational levels of women in the civil service.

Madame Chairperson and members of the committee

I would like to emphasize that my Government, as a democratic developmental state, is raising the wellbeing of the Ethiopian people and that of women in particular, through human resource development centered capacity building. Based on this principle, Ethiopia's education policy aims at: Democratization of the national culture as well as decentralization of educational opportunities based on equity and equality. While all these four interrelated items are important, equity and democratization carry more weight in advancing women's education in Ethiopia.

By equity is meant focusing on rural development, where women constitute 50 percent of the disadvantaged population. The government has been implementing development programs that are reaching communities with special needs. In consequence, female school enrolment has been increasing and the dropout rate has been declining. Ethiopia is one of the sub Saharan countries who will meet the MDG by 2015 in the education sector in the primary level. It is the improvements in the rural development that placed Ethiopia on the UN Human Development index rating. This is due to strong commitment expressed in terms of resource allocation, infrastructure development and accessibility of schools and capacity building of teachers, better remuneration and hope in developing their careers.

Though it is difficult to indicate in definitive terms, the democratization of the general culture, gender mainstreaming , sensitization and inclusion of civics (from first grade on) in the national educational curricula is also showing promising signs. It pleases me to point out that among other measures aimed at narrowing the gender gap. Ethiopia has a sound and comprehensive Women policy that reflects the government's commitment to equality of women and men. Paramount in all this is the policymakers' determination to bring about significant poverty reduction with special focus on women. The root causes of women's challenges can be traced to the entrenched patriarchal culture and their economic dependence. The government believes that unless the deep rooted patriarchal thinking is overcome and women are economically emancipated, not much can be accomplished. It is with this firm belief that the government is intensively investing in women's education and their economic empowerment.

Important step has been taken to increase the literacy level of adult women and raising general awareness. Awareness-creation programs, especially in rural areas were launched to sensitize parents to send their children to school. There has been also an effort to increase the intake and survival-rate of female students in higher learning institutions through affirmative action. The government is also applying different support-schemes and incentive packages to encourage parents to send their daughters to school in rural areas where dropout- rate and absenteeism of girls is a problem.

The government has developed strategy to meet the challenges of those with special educational needs. Based on the strategy, different kinds of facilities, such as supplying vital learning aids, training teachers to teach disabled children, awareness creation to encourage parents to send their disabled children to school, creation of a conducive environment where girls with disabilities are able to enroll in higher-learning institution were provided.

Madame Chairperson and members of the committee

As part of its commitment to protect women's rights enshrined in various national, regional and international human right instruments, the government is taking tangible steps to improve women's health status amid promising results. It is also engaged in a range of efforts to improve access to and raise the quality of family-planning services. This includes free family- planning lessons at public facilities. The health policy and health sector development program emphasize on universal access to essential health services, focusing on the poor and the vulnerable in rural communities. Several measures, including awareness-creation efforts have also been taken aimed at reduction of maternal mortality, like improving access to health service through the health extension program, human resource development and rapid expansion of primary health care units. Needless to say, positive gains have also been made on this front. Maternal mortality rate has declined as well. But still we have to go a long way to reach the motto of "No Mother Shall Die "while giving birth.

As a UN member state, Ethiopia is signatory to the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS of the UN General Assembly issued on June 2006. Since then Ethiopia has made notable achievements in the response against HIV and AIDS. To contain the spread of this epidemic, the government has exerted a tremendous effort. A national HIV/AIDS policy was framed in 1998 to create an enabling environment to fight the pandemic. An HIV/AIDS- related legislation was written into law which has had a positive impact in controlling the spread of the disease. In this regard, civil society involvement, particularly in the process of planning, monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS responses at various

levels has been effective. Encouraging as the results have been, the government acknowledges that greater work needs to be done if the national goal of eradication is to be met.

Madame Chairperson and members of the committee

Among the Harmful Traditional Practices contributing to the low social health status of women in the country, early marriage takes the leading role. To combat this problem the government, besides criminalizing the act, is providing a wide range of awareness creation, sensitization, advocacy and other necessary programmes in collaboration with national and international partners. Regional states, where early marriage is practiced have adopted several systems to insure girls attain the legal minimum age requirement before marriage. The legal minimum age of marriage in the Federal Revised Family Code is 18 years. Most of the regional states, except two which are on the way to enact family laws, for inserted a family code into their laws. Some states have even raised the age limit to 21.

In general, the government has committed itself to the full implementation of women's rights. The leadership has pledged to spare no effort to ensure women's rights are observed in every part of the country. To this end, it has facilitated a visit by a Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) in 2009. The Commissioner met with chief policymakers, civil society organizations, religious leaders and national institutions. The Commission also interfaced with other relevant actors active in the promotion and protection of human rights, the African Charter, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and relevant legal instruments ratified by the State Party. The visit resulted in a comprehensive report on the state of the rights of women in Ethiopia. The recommendations offered, I have to say, were helpful in improving Ethiopia's implementation of women's right.

Madame Chairperson and members of the committee

It will be remiss of my duty if I were to omit stating that, despite our best efforts, we still face many challenges and shortcomings in bringing the equality of women and men. The country continues to face challenges regarding the fullest enjoyment of Women's right enshrined in the Convention. The challenges lay bare the fact that the fulfillment of the Convention is a process. Lack of awareness, deep-rooted negative traditional norms, lack of education and limited state capacity compounds our challenges. While the Government is firmly committed to do everything in its power to ensure the protection and promotion of women's rights, it fully recognizes the value of international co-operation in the area. Likewise it understands that the contribution of civil society groups is vital if the government is to meet its obligations in accordance with international and regional human rights instruments.

Madam Chair person and members of the committee

In conclusion, Mme chairperson, on behalf of my delegation and myself, I would like once again to thank you and the distinguished members of the Committee for this opportunity to present Ethiopia's report. I would also like to ask your indulgences for taking your time to positively and constructively engage with us, which I believe will help us to continue our efforts to bridge the inequality gap between women and men and finally to see the Ethiopian girl children enjoy their fullest equality with their baby brothers.

I thank you!