

Statement
by
H.E. Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya
Permanent Representative of Nepal
to the United Nations
at
the 49th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of
all Forms of Discrimination against Women

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New York

**Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the committee,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is indeed a privilege and honor for me and my delegation to take part in this dialogue on the fulfillment of our national obligations under the historic convention. Let me introduce my delegation. Hon minister could not attend the meeting because of some unavoidable circumstances.

Madam Chairperson,

Preparing a national report on the state of implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was in itself a rewarding process of self-assessment. It provided us with an opportunity to reflect on what we, as a party to the Convention, promised to achieve, what we could achieve and where we lagged behind in realizing our aspirations for a discrimination-free and empowered society. We have already been through that broad-based exercise and the outcome thereof is presented to you.

AS per the spirit of CEDAW, which looks at the issue related to women in a holistic manner, The Government of Nepal approved the National Action Plan on CEDAW in 2003. Prepared in consultation with all stakeholders, the action plan has formed the basis of our reform initiatives. The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare is co-coordinating its implementation.

In its thirtieth session held in January 2004, the committee considered the Combined Second and Third Periodic Reports of Nepal. The observations of the Committee have since helped re-orient our efforts where necessary.

Without repeating much of what has already been said in the report and in our subsequent response to your concerns, I would like to take this opportunity to touch on the milestones that we have passed during the reporting period and afterwards, and the challenges we are making efforts to grapple with.

Following the popular movement of April 2006, Nepal has undergone far-reaching political changes. At present, the Constituent Assembly is at the final stage of drawing up a new Constitution. We certainly did not wait until the period of transformation to press ahead with anti-discriminatory measures or affirmative actions under the comprehensive framework of the Convention. Indeed, decisive participation of women was deemed indispensable for successful completion of this unprecedented transformation, not least the peace process associated with it. Accordingly, the House of Representatives, in May 2006, adopted a resolution calling for guaranteeing at least 33 per cent representation of women in all parts of the state structure with the aim of achieving proportionate representation ultimately.

In September the same year, the Act to Amend Some Nepal Acts to Maintain Gender Equality was promulgated with the effect of either amending or repealing a total of 65 provisions in various Acts that were found discriminatory against women.

The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 represents another major step forward. The obligations, directive principles and policies of the State as enshrined in the Constitution have explicitly provided for putting a stop to gender discrimination, for ensuring women's participation in all parts of the state machinery on the basis of proportionate inclusion, and also for taking special measures in respect of education, health care and employment. The Constitution has for the first time stated women's fundamental rights.

Parliament has continued to pass new and important legislations with a view to advancing gender equality as well as prohibiting violence or discrimination against women, including the National Commission on Women Act, 2006, the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, 2007 and the Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2009. Legislative moves are afoot to amend some 60 more discriminatory provisions in the law, to outlaw harmful social practices and to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

The law has also enabled progressive interpretation thereof by the judiciary as reflected in a series of its verdicts of late. The directive orders of the Supreme Court of Nepal for necessary enactments or programmatic interventions issued in the light of the provisions of the Constitution and those of the Convention have been equally important.

Madam Chairperson,

The principles of CEDAW have found expression in our development policy, too. Broadly speaking, Government of Nepal has pursued the policy of mainstreaming gender considerations in all sectors of development as well as encouraging women's presence at all levels of authority. Women's representation is valued not only in ownership terms but also in terms of making a difference in policy initiatives and their outcomes. Therefore we have taken a comprehensive approach to it.

The 2006 Parliamentary Proclamation has created a wave of change in representation everywhere. The Constituent Assembly, which also functions as Legislative Parliament, was among the first to abide by the 33 per cent minimum rule. By doing so, the highest legislative body has provided an example for all other agencies to follow. Thus we see at least 33 per cent women in local peace committees, users' groups and community-based organizations supported under various development projects. Earlier women's representation would often mean one or two members; now it invariably means a minimum of the critical mass. This has given more voice to women, further encouraged gender-focused initiatives and completely changed the development landscape in the field. We intend to continue doing that in the days ahead.

Women's presence is visibly increasingly in the Civil Service, in the Nepal Police and in other institutions where it was rather obscure only a few years ago. Over 150 laws contain affirmative provisions facilitating women's access to, or involvement in, various spheres of public activity.

Maintaining the momentum of reform, the current Three-Year Plan (2010/11 – 2012/13) aims to eliminate discrimination and violence of all types against women, envisages women's representation in the state apparatus passing the 33 per cent mark, and lays emphasis on strengthening gender mainstreaming in all aspects of development, governance and service delivery.

Continued advocacy of gender issues has its own impact. Within the government, ministries have taken the initiative in crafting sector-specific policies. The 2009 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy of the Ministry of Local Development is a case in point. A new impetus to that process was provided in 2010 by elevating the level of gender focal points in ministries or other agencies. Now the chief of the Planning Division is designated as the gender focal point.

Gender mainstreaming is ensured in decentralized planning and review as well. In districts the process is led by a broad-based mainstreaming committee chaired by the President of the District Development Committee and facilitated by the Women Development Officer. The district team has its own network of gender focal points in GOs and voluntarily listed NGOs.

It has been increasingly realized that gender issues are the rights issues, that women's participation makes all the difference everywhere, and that the superordinate goal of achieving gender equality calls for a comprehensive approach and concerted effort, widely shared ownership and reinforcement of linkages. The Ministry of Finance co-ordinates gender-responsive budgeting, the Ministry of General Administration takes the lead in affirmative reforms and the Ministries of Local Development, and Women, Children and Social Welfare have jointly executed a Gender Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion Project., Ministry of Law and Justice has initiated legal reform processes and Ministries of Education and Health lay particular emphasis on women's empowerment through respective work programs. Similarly working together in close cooperation with the NGOs, CBOs and local groups, we intend to pursue our goal of making our society free from discrimination, together with women's empowerment, a reality.

Madam Chairperson,

It is in the context that translating policies into practical programs has been a priority of Government of Nepal. Various programs have been in operation in the country with a view to addressing gender issues, expanding opportunities for women and bringing women's agency to bear on the task of nation building. These programs include welcome-to-school campaigns, maternity incentive schemes, micro-credit services; cash transfer plans, policy-level consultations, and community-based access-to-justice initiatives.

The Women Development Program is targeted for an estimated 3.9 million rural deprived women who have missed out schooling or other opportunities for development early on; this program is now extended to 3,448 of the country's total 3,915 Village Development Committees. The Program has proved to be effective in creating forums for participation, in forming social capital and in fostering women-led micro-enterprises. In village after village women's groups have pulled together, fighting discrimination and violence, and creating a force for social change. Since 2003, with a separate component tailored to their needs, out-of-school adolescent girls have also been included in the target group of the program.

In addition, a wide variety of programs is being carried out by NGOs. NGO activities are particularly effective in building public awareness, in organizing specifically marginalized groups and in giving care to those in need. Often government agencies and NGOs collaborate on such activities.

Part of the strategy is to mobilize additional funding for focused programs by way of gender-responsive budgeting. Initiated in 2007/08, the process has led to a gradual increase in allocations to programs that benefit women directly. Of the total budgeted expenditure for fiscal year 2011/12, that was presented a few days ago, 19 per cent will directly go to women related programs and 45 per cent is indirectly responsive to closing the gender gap. Similar steps have been taken to ensure women's access to local government resources. The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy 2009 stipulates that at least 10 per cent of the Village Development Grant should be spent on programs related to women directly.

I would also like to put on record our gratitude to the United Nations agencies and other development partners for their continued support for the policy initiatives and implementation of various gender specific programs in Nepal.

Madam Chairperson,

The Government of Nepal has made efforts to confront violence against women on a priority basis. More recently, we began a focused campaign by declaring 2010 as the Year against Gender-related Violence. A specific National Action Plan was worked out with a vision to make Nepal free from violence against women and girls.

Efforts have been intensified to raise awareness, institute referral mechanisms and extend services to the needy. A Gender-based Violence Complaint Management and Monitoring Unit has been set up in the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, Women and Children Service Cells have been created in District Police Offices, and networks of community and district service centers with safe houses have also been established in 15 districts for women and children affected by domestic violence. This will be further expanded in the days ahead.

An inter-ministerial committee chaired by the Chief Secretary has been formed to oversee the implementation of the action plan. An Advisory Committee comprising Members of Legislative Parliament, Chairperson of the National Commission on Women and NGO representatives advises the inter-ministerial committee on its functions. Activities in districts are co-ordinated by a similar committee called 'District Resource Group' led by the Chief District Officer. Efforts have been intensified to raise awareness, institute referral mechanisms and extend services to the needy. A complain management monitoring unit has been set up in the office of the prime minister, women service cells have been created in district police offices.

Anti-trafficking actions have been stepped up alongside. Just now consultations are taking place on revising the 2001 National Plan of Action with an added emphasis on law enforcement. Addressing domestic violence is part of the plan as it often increases vulnerability to trafficking. Life skills and livelihood support programs for out-of-school adolescent girls have been extended

to remote rural areas, and rehabilitation centres for trafficking survivors have been established in eight districts of the country.

In this process a Five-Year National Action Plan on Implementing the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 has been approved in 2010. A high-level Steering Committee chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs has been constituted to ensure that the resolutions are implemented effectively.

Madam Chairperson,

That actions are beginning to bear fruit is reflected in statistics. The proportion of people living below the national poverty line has been reduced from 42 in 1995/96 to 31 in 2003/04 and further to 25.4 in 2008/09.

At the time of the 1991 census, Nepal was a rare case of men having a longer life expectancy than women. But that changed by the next census in 2001 and is estimated to have changed further now. Women today can expect to live 64.5 years – nearly a year more than men.

The GDI has increased from 0.452 in 2004 to 0.499 in 2009. The GEM has increased likewise – from 0.391 in 2004 to 0.496 in 2009.

Considerable progress has been made in lowering the level of maternal mortality. The maternal mortality ratio has been reduced from 539 in 1996 to 281 in 2006 and further to 229 in 2009. The infant mortality rate has also registered a declining trend – from 79 in 1996 to 64.4 in 2001 and further to 48 in 2006. Within the five years of the last two DHS surveys, the TFR has been reduced by 1 – from 4.1 in 2001 to 3.1 in 2006.

Gender parity has been achieved in primary education and gaps are closing, albeit slowly, in other areas, too. Literacy is an example. In 2001, the overall literacy rate was 53.7 per cent with a gap of 22.6 percentage points in male and female literacy rates. In 2010, the overall literacy rate has gone up to 63.7 per cent and the gap in male and female literacy rates has narrowed to 22.3 percentage points.

The 2010 Progress Report indicates that Nepal is on course to achieve many of the MDG related targets, provided the global support is scaled up consistent with our national efforts.

We are making our best efforts to grapple with trafficking in women and girls that takes place in various guise. There is also a growing concern for the safety of women in some cases in foreign employment, which we are making efforts to deal with.

While there have been a number of improvements, gender disparities in development indicators are still a matter of concern. Factors often correlate and have a combined effect on disempowerment. Early marriage, for instance, frequently deprives a girl of schooling, takes its toll on her health and is also likely to weaken her say in the family.

Even with temporary special measures, women's representation in the Civil Service stands at 13.29 per cent, indicating that much remains to be done in meeting the target of 33 per cent representation in government agencies, private businesses and professional jobs.

Similarly, we are making efforts to reach targeted programs to as many women as possible, but we face many constraints. Many are in need of specifically packaged programs, such as the Household Development Plan based on conditional cash transfer designed for conflict-affected single women and women of the *Badi* community. Reaching out to all of them presents a challenge of its own, as does mobilizing extra resources for that purpose.

Madam Chairperson,

Government of Nepal remains committed to eliminating discrimination against women in all its forms and manifestations and empower them to contribute to an inclusive and sustainable development in the country.

We have yet to achieve our goals, yet our achievements so far have been encouraging. If we could achieve gender parity in primary education, we certainly can do so in secondary education and, with additional efforts, in higher education in due course of time. And that will also enable proportionate representation of women everywhere, including the upper echelons of our organizations. This will have some spin off effects on many areas.

We have also learnt from experience that gains in empowerment can occur from any point on the scale. This means that the leverage lies in creating alternative opportunities for the hundreds of thousands of women who never went to school or dropped out after a few years. With gains in awareness, economic self-reliance and social influence, vulnerability will be reduced, harmful social practices will die out and discrimination will give way to equity.

I would like to point out here that in many areas of our activities, human and financial resources have also come in the way of speedy progress towards elimination of discrimination against and empowerment of women. We all know that it is work in progress. And we believe that this dialogue will not only contribute to reviewing our national progress and challenges, but also contribute to further encourage a scaled-up support and cooperation from the international community especially for those countries, where there is a dearth of human and financial capacity to fully and speedily implement its national objectives and obligations under CEDAW.

Thank you for your attention.