

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ASOKE KUMAR MUKERJI,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, AT THE FIRST REGULAR
SESSION OF EXECUTIVE BOARD OF UN WOMEN ON
JANUARY20, 2014**

Madame President,

Allow me to first congratulate my distinguished colleague from Uruguay on his election as President of the Bureau, as well as my felicitations to all the other Vice Presidents, who have been elected today. I wish him and his entire team all success in steering the agenda of the Executive Board through 2014, in the larger pursuit of ensuring UN Women's goals on gender equality and women's empowerment.

My compliments also to the Executive Director of UN Women, Madam Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuk on an extremely informative statement. My delegation is heartened to learn about both UN Women's operational response at the country level, as well, by the nature and approach of your humanitarian strategy.

Madam Phumzile , you began your presentation today with a slide on UN Women's proactive role in India during the campaign towards ending violence against women. Let me take this opportunity to reiterate that the Government of India is equally committed, as UN Women, if not more in ensuring that ending violence against women is a top most priority. Apart from promulgating laws India has instituted effective redressal mechanisms to prevent recurrence of such incidents, as well as bring the perpetrators of such crimes to speedy justice.

Madame President, as founding members of the Executive Board of UN Women, and also as the largest contributor to UN Women's core resources from developing countries, let me affirm at the outset, that we are committed in ensuring the all round social, economic and political empowerment of our women, whatever effort and resources, the task might take.

When we embarked upon the Strategic Plan of UN Women during its inception, we had called for it, to be '*ambitious, achievable and results oriented*'. Today, in the fourth operational year of UN Women, my delegation is happy to note that UN Women has been able to significantly influence policy narratives across the globe in areas ranging from political participation and leadership, economic empowerment, ending violence against women and gender equality.

However, serious challenges still remain to be addressed. Statistics testify that even today women bear a disproportionate burden of the world's poverty and constitute nearly 70% of the world's poor and despite estimates that they perform approximately 66% of the world's work and produce approximately 50% of the food, they only earn 10% of the income and own only 1% of the property.

Madame. President, I would therefore today, take this opportunity to request UN Women to consider focusing perhaps a bit more , on an idea which has not yet been fully tapped to its full potential, but has the power to significantly transform the narrative of the women's empowerment debate in developing countries.

Madam President, empowering women using enabling technologies, can be a game changer if harnessed and applied to its full potential in developing countries. Let me cite one small example from my own country to illustrate how technologies if properly harnessed can change the lives of millions of women across the globe.

We have this project at the Barefoot College near Tilonia in the Rajasthan state of India, which has a very simple logo "***Train a grandmother, change the world***". A most innovative concept of training one village women from nearly any corner of the developing world to become a solar engineer!

Grannies from across 48 countries in the world, have so far been trained here, and each of them went back as a force multiplier helping up light her own entire village based on the skill she learnt at this college.

And look at the statistics, as of December 1 2012, there were 700 women graduates who had brought lights on in 1015 formerly completely unelectrified villages all around the world.

A very simple idea, founded on the Gandhian principles of grass roots change, force multiplied by technology training, as an enabling tool for the absolutely uninitiated rural women who were living on less than a dollar a day!

It was the conviction that even uneducated poor women have the right to use technologies to improve their life and skills, that brought the project so far, and it was only by placing such technologies in their hands and in their own control that they have made thousands of such women, completely self dependent and gainfully employed.

Now imagine, if we were to significantly expand the ambit of applying such enabling technologies from beyond the domain of just renewable energy to applying **enhanced ICT technologies** for women in education, access to clean drinking water, healthcare, rural handicrafts and communications and decentralise their uses by transferring the access, control, management and ownership of such sophisticated technologies to rural women themselves, we would be able to bring about structural transformation in the lives of millions of women across the globe.

Madam President, I cited this example only to illustrate that such small initiatives have the scope for replication and bringing about meaningful change, as we still have a long way to go in our common pursuit for ensuring women's all round economic empowerment. Representing a country which is home to more than 500 million women, it is our firm conviction that its only by placing the enabling tool in the hands of women at the grass roots I can real and transformative changes be indeed brought about.

We therefore hope that UN Women be able to utilise on this theme, as its plans to further its operational activities in developing countries, for this can really help force multiply our common cause.

Another point that I would like to submit for consideration today is that unfortunately, work on gender equality and empowerment of women still continues to remain chronically underfunded. If we have to ensure that UN

Women stands for action, the donor community must move beyond the political rhetoric of just stated commitments, and transform them into the much needed monetary support for the organization.

On our part, as per our stated commitment, just last month we handed over the fourth installment of our contribution of one million US dollars to UN Women, taking it to 4 million US dollars so far. This is part of our continuing contribution of five million dollar commitment spread over five years to UN Women's core predictable funding.

We will continue to provide full political and financial support to UN Women and hope that together along with UN women, we can succeed in realising our collective vision of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. On behalf of the Government of India, let me affirm to you that India, would never be found wanting in that endeavour.

I thank you Madam. President.

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