



Permanent Mission of Eritrea  
to the United Nations

Check against delivery

Statement by **Ms. George Gai**  
Head of Social Services and Rehabilitation Department  
National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW)

High level plenary of the 54<sup>th</sup> session of  
the Commission on the Status of Women

New York, 5 March 2010

Chairperson,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by congratulating you and the other members of the Bureau for your unanimous election to steer the affairs of the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women. We are confident that you will reach a successful conclusion. At the outset, my delegation wishes to associate itself with the statements made by the representatives of Equatorial Guinea and the Republic of Yemen, on behalf of the African Group and the Group of 77 and China respectively.

While I have the floor, Chairperson, I wish to reiterate heartfelt condolences to the Government and people of Eritrea to Chile for the loss of lives and properties as a result of the devastating earthquakes in those countries.

Chairperson,

As we gather together at this important juncture to review the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action to take stock of the progress and challenges the status of women since the Fourth World Conference on Women and the passage of the twenty-third special session in June 2009, Eritrea takes pride to have participated in this important review session.

This intervention has been designed on many levels after fifteen years of implementing the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and ten years after the declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Eritrea completed a comprehensive gender evaluation in 2008 and this evaluation has been published. Therefore, on behalf of the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUW) and the national women's machinery of Eritrea, I am pleased to share Eritrea's successes, challenges and opportunities in the last 15 years. I wish to focus on one of the critical areas of concern in this intervention: education and training, health, violence, institutional mechanisms, decision making, and poverty. I have attached a longer version of this statement for more details.

**Education** In Eritrea, gender equality is a national development priority. The government of the State of Eritrea (SEI) mandated for every citizen to complete primary education and it made access to schools free at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. In the last 5 years, education sector development program focused on improved gender sensitive access, curriculum, textbooks, quality assurance and school support services. A number of schools were established, especially in rural and more remote areas, closer to village communities. Boarding schools and hostels have been constructed for girls and disadvantaged children. Moreover, the government initiated a proactive action for girls to promote girls participation at all levels. As a result, participation of girls increased from 12% to 34% at university and college levels in the last 15 years.

**Health** Gender and reproductive health is second priority area. In 2005, the government of Eritrea formulated a Health Sector Policy which emphasizes equitable provision of basic health services to all Eritreans. Priority is given to the prevention and control of infectious diseases, especially HIV/AIDS/STI, TB and malaria, as well as the reduction of maternal mortality. As a result, the maternal death reduced from 1000 to 450/100,000 lives in the last 15 years.

**Violence** This is another priority area for Eritrea. The abolition of FGM/C practices has been one of its main aims for the next several years. Efforts have been made since late 1970s (before the formal independence of Eritrea in 1993) by the then de facto government, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, towards the eradication of female genital mutilation (FGM/C). In the wake of these efforts, the government initiated to have community laws which ban FGM/C. On the basis of this initiative the Government of Eritrea drafted a legislation known as Proclamation 158/2007 and the practice was banned in March 2007. The proclamation made female genital mutilation (FGM/C) a criminal offence while the prevalence survey on this is in process, there are already indications that the practice is

declining in many communities; but it is less prevalent in the younger age groups than the older ones.

**Institutional Mechanisms:** Gender mainstreaming, which is widely understood as the most important mechanism to reach the MDGs, is a long and complex process of implementation in Eritrea. The Ministries of Education, Health, Agriculture, Livestock and Forestry, and Water and Environment have developed gender mainstreaming strategy guidelines in the implementation process. This strategy, with the support of various international and non-governmental institutions across the country, has been incorporated into the MDGs into its national development programming and they have been commonly accepted as a framework for measuring development progress.

**Decision making:** With regard to women empowerment and decision making, women in Eritrea's parliament represent 22%. This means that Eritrean women in the higher echelons of legislative body have not reached the level of satisfaction and consistent effort is needed to anchor their position. By the same token, various measures have been taken to ensure women's equal representation in all levels of government posts. At the present time, out of the 17 Cabinet Minister posts, 4 are held by women and one of the six Regional Governors is a woman. Affirmative action was encouraged in national elections of community administrators in the year 2004 and in all subsequent elections to date. The percentage of women elected for community functions in the recent election of 2005 was 29.6 / 16%.

**Poverty:** In the area of poverty reduction, the government of Eritrea has given high priority to policies and programs aimed at achieving economic growth and development. The government's commitment to poverty reduction is enshrined and articulated in all major policy documents, such as the Macro Policy of 1994, the interim PRSP and the Food Security Strategy, both of 2004. Women have benefited from the Land Reform Program of 1994 in Eritrea where communalism of land is the basic source of economy. Currently, 54% of the land reform beneficiaries are women. However, the challenge is to ensure that the government of Eritrea, eradication of poverty is the greatest challenge due to the recurring drought in the last decade.

Chairperson,  
Distinguished Delegates,

In conclusion, it will be realized if it can be going up the road to development and peace. Peace and development go hand in hand. If there is no peace, there is no development. Therefore, to sustain the achievements made so far and to tackle future challenges, peace is crucial not only in Eritrea, but in the Continent of Africa, particularly our unfortunate Horn of Africa sub-region. The lack of peace in the Horn of Africa, Chairperson, has a devastating effect on the

civilian populations, specially children, women and the elderly. The refusal of Ethiopia to withdraw from Eritrea's occupied territories and now the unjust sanction on its access to the security council will hamper development and the advancement of women in my country. Allow me, therefore, in avail of this occasion to call upon this august Commission and the international community to pressure Ethiopia to withdraw from Eritrean territories it is presently occupying and committing to the timing of the final Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) which will continue to be binding. We appeal also for the abstaining and renouncing of security council resolutions 1907 of 23 December 2004.

Let me close my intervention, Chairperson, by saying that we, women in Eritrea, salute the evolution of women around the world and reiterate our solidarity and commitment to the goals we set for ourselves in Beijing in 1995.

I thank you, Chairperson, for your attention.

Chairperson,  
Distinguished Delegates,

In conclusion, I will be remised if I fail to bring up the linkage between development and peace. Peace and development go hand in hand. If there is no peace, there is no development. Therefore, to sustain the achievements made so far and to tackle future challenges, peace is crucial not only in Africa, but in the Continent of Africa, particularly our unfortunate Horn of Africa sub-region. The lack of peace in the Horn of Africa has been a major obstacle to the economic