Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative, at the Second Regular Session of 2012 of the Executive Board of UN Women on November 28, 2012

Mr. President,

My felicitations to the Executive Director and Under Secretary-General, Madam Michelle Bachelet for her extremely informative statement and our complements for a well analysed report on the administrative, budgetary and financial implications and implementation of the Regional Architecture review plan, which has been placed for consideration before the Second Regular Session of the Executive Board.

Mr. President, when we adopted the Decision 2012/4 at the Annual Session on Regional Architecture Review, earlier this year, there were questions on how the process would evolve and even doubts on the transparency of the whole process.

Let me submit, at the outset, that your comprehensive and detailed report on this subject at this Session, coupled with the briefings which preceded this Session, have allayed concerns of most member states, through an extremely well thought out, consultative and transparent process.

As outlined in the conclusion of your report, the regional architecture process is a change management response to the vision of the UN Women Strategic Plan, which sees UN Women achieve a much greater impact than its constituent entities were previously able to do, in the pursuit of results, in particular at the country level, including results achieved through leveraging the capacities of the United Nations system as a whole.

While my delegation broadly aligns itself with the overarching objective of this exercise, and hopes that by the end of 2013 when you envisage to complete the process, the UN Women entity would certainly be a more dynamic, lean, effective and efficient unit, which would partner with national governments in the pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment.

We also hope that this transition to the new architecture is carried out with the minimum disruptions to operations of UN Women, particularly at the country level, thereby minimising the one off costs and adverse impact on staff, associated with such changes and incorporates flexibility to allow for adaptations to the plan, if opportunities or unforeseen risks to its viability do arise.

Mr. President, allow me to submit that UN Women’s strategic plan needs to have a specific strategy for the special challenges and opportunities in South Asia, along with a specific identification of corresponding structure of implementation, and that this
exercise of the review of regional architecture of UN Women should continue to respond to these priorities. These should also include, active partnerships with national governments of countries in South Asia, especially where there are a large proportion of women populations.

It is also our considered submission that the proposed architecture of UN Women should not adversely impact or dismantle the South Asia focus of UN Women, and inadvertently subsume it under an overarching ‘all Asia approach,’ which may not take into account the regional specificities of South Asia.

My delegation therefore would like to submit that in the process of the regional architecture being carried out, it would not be desirable to dilute UN Women’s presence at the proposed multi country office in India.

Given this backdrop, we hope that the regional architecture review would affirm to the red lines drawn by you in Para 52 (b) of your report, and therefore attempt to cause least disruptions to the existing operations of the sub regional office in New Delhi, as you plan to expand the future role and scope of UN Women’s operations in the South Asian region.

Mr. President, representing a country which is home to more than 500 million women, women’s economic and political empowerment has been the cornerstone of our policy making, all along.

More so, when 69% of our total women population (nearly 405 million women) reside in the rural areas alone. It is in this context, that contribution of rural women to our GDP growth and their central role in poverty reduction has been a key guiding factor in the framing of our national policies.

In this regard, allow me to place my Nodal Ministry (the Ministry of Women and Child Development)’s sincerest appreciation for UN Women, for their active partnership and constructive advice in the Working Group for the Twelfth Plan Chapter on Women’s Agency and Empowerment. Your agenda of making ’gender a lived reality’ finds resonance in the overall policy approach of the Government of India, which has also been outlined in the 12th Five Year Plan of my country.

While economic empowerment of Indian women at the grass roots level, especially through the Self-Help Groups has been a hall mark of India’s success story, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), the world’s largest enabling project at grass roots democracy, has helped engender the REAL political and economic empowerment of women by ensuring that at least one third of its beneficiaries are women. During the extremely successful visit of Madam Bachelet to India in October this year, Madame, you witnessed at first, the fruits of the project, which we have achieved in partnership and with the support of UN Women in
Rajasthan, where 65000 women counsellors at the grass roots level, have been trained to provide leadership and vision to their community.

Mr. President, we are happy to note the significant achievements that UN Women has achieved within a short operational span of two years, since its inception, under the dynamic leadership of Madame Bachelet.

As the UN embarks upon the process of the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) to shape the overall policy direction for the next four years for the UN Development agenda, you can count on our support to ensure that Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment remains a fundamental pillar which is given due weightage in setting the development agenda. In this regard, we are happy to note the evolving text of the QCPR draft resolution under discussion, especially the emphasis on women's empowerment as outlined within the Chapter IV on National Capacity Building.

My delegation also calls for a comprehensive resource mobilisation strategy to secure the resources required by UN Women in meeting its global commitments. Let me also re-iterate that as part of our stated commitment of five million US dollars to UN Women’s core predictable funding, India has already contributed two million US dollars to UN Women, so far. We will continue to provide full political and financial support to UN Women and count on the support of others, to do likewise.

Let me conclude, Mr. President, by reaffirming India’s steadfast commitment to all round social, economic and political empowerment of our women, whatever effort and resources, the task might take. It is upto us, members of the Executive Board to ensure that UN Women, under the leadership of Madam Bachelet, is given the necessary authority, mandate and resources to deliver. We assure you that in this journey of yours, India would never be found wanting.

Thank You.