STATEMENT BY MR. BHARTRUHARI MAHATAB, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 62 – [A] ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN AND [B] IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOME OF THE 4\textsuperscript{TH} WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND OF THE 23\textsuperscript{RD} SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE 64\textsuperscript{TH} SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 13, 2009

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, please allow me to thank the Secretary General for his reports on this agenda item. Our delegation would like to align itself with the statement made by the Chair of the G77 in this Committee.

Mr. Chairman,

Advancement and empowerment of women is one of the most critical aspects of social development in all parts of the world. The centrality of women in our society can
hardly be overstated. We, therefore, need to do all that is possible for the effective implementation of policies that would give women their rightful place in society. The beneficial impact of such empowerment can only have the most positive of impacts on all aspects of development and the achieving of the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Chairman,

The year that has just gone by has been one of the most difficult ones for most countries in the developing world with a disproportionately adverse impact on their economies even though they were not the cause of the global crisis. Within this disproportionate impact, women were among those most seriously affected as has been mentioned in various reports of the Secretary General.

The report on ‘the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas’ notes that the current crisis exacerbated the inequalities and discrimination faced by women as they were the first to lose their jobs and social security while their household responsibility of care giving increased. Although countries have undertaken domestic responses to tackle this situation, the need for international cooperation and increased contributions to bilateral and multilateral financial assistance programs for developing countries cannot be overemphasized.

Mr. Chairman,

Since adoption of its Constitution in 1950, India has been taking numerous steps to ensure equality of women in all walks of life. Empowering women politically, educationally, economically and legally has been a major objective of the Government of India. The National Policy for Empowerment of Women seeks the creation of an environment conducive for the development of women; ending discrimination against women; and providing equal access to health care, education, employment and social security. The 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012) has recognized women as agents of sustained socio-economic growth and change. Gender has been made a cross-cutting theme in all the development plans. The Ministry of Women and Child Development is implementing a number of programmes to achieve holistic empowerment of women through schemes that provide micro credit and support systems like working women’s hostels, short stay homes and crèches.

One, particularly, successful scheme has been the women’s empowerment programme, namely, the ‘Swayamsidha’, which means ‘self help’. This scheme seeks to empower women by creating economically sustainable Self Help Groups. It serves the purpose of generating awareness, ensuring access to resources and a sustained process of mobilization. This programme is a silent revolution for empowering women; as a result, more than 2.2 million Self Help Groups were created across the country, covering 33 million households.
Mr. Chairman,

Representation of women in the political processes of our country not only reflects our commitment to the advancement of women at every level but also gives them an opportunity to be heard on their terms. We are proud of the fact that India has given women equal voting rights right from our independence, more than 60 years ago. We have also successfully implemented reservation of 33% seats in urban and local self government for women, thereby giving more than one million women a voice at the grassroot level. The Government has also recently approved increasing this percentage to 50%, subject, of course, to approval of Parliament.

The Parliament, on its part, has a Joint Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women which is charged with the task of ensuring that legislations in India are gender sensitive. Further, to ensure that gender sensitive policies are not abandoned for lack of funds, most of the Ministries and Departments of the Government have put in place Gender Budgeting. This initiative helps to monitor the actual implementation of policies and programs meant to benefit women.

Mr. Chairman.

While development and empowerment of women is one side of the coin, the flip side is the rampant problem of exploitation and violence against women. Apart from taking measures to punish the perpetrators of such crimes, we are also taking steps to rehabilitate victims and strengthen the legal system to prevent such crimes. India has enacted the ‘Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act’ that has given women a powerful tool in the fight against domestic violence. The most recent initiative to follow-up on the legislation is the ‘National Campaign on Prevention of Violence against Women (2009-2015), which was launched on October 2nd this year, the 140th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

Mr. Chairman,

It has often been said that there are occasions when we must forget or unlearn the lessons of the past in order to progress. Women have been repressed and discriminated against for centuries even though they perform some of the most integral and socially valuable tasks in our homes and in the work place. Mahatma Gandhi had said nearly a century ago, “[woman] has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him”. It is in our hands to channel the tremendous energy and potential that women have by giving them the rightful place in the society.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

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