

**Statement of the delegation of Sri Lanka at the panel discussion on elimination of discrimination against women, Human Rights Council, 20 September 2010**

Mr. President,

At the outset, my delegation would like to thank the panelists for their presentations and would like to make some observations, sharing Sri Lanka's experience in our efforts aimed at the elimination of discrimination against women.

Mr President,

In Sri Lanka, the situation of women has improved remarkably as is demonstrated by higher levels of attainment in relation to education, health and economic empowerment all of which have been made possible due to increased sensitivity to women's issues and a firm Government policy that seeks to empower women and address their needs. Attitudinal changes that favour the position of women in society have been possible largely due to high levels of educational attainment and women being thereby recognized as equal partners and valuable contributors to the development process.

Sri Lanka has integrated the MDGs into the national development agenda and is on track in reaching most of the indicators while some have been already achieved at national level. Among the notable achievements are those relating to equitable primary education, child mortality and maternal mortality, access to safe drinking water and literacy. It is significant that there is no gender disparity in these achievements. It is noteworthy that a majority of these goals have a direct impact on the situation relating to women and are being seriously pursued through State action.

The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act adopted in 2005 continues to function as a strong legal safeguard against violence aimed at women and this Act along with the Penal Code provide victims of violence with accessible and effective measures of redress and protection.

Gender equality is the denominator of the fundamental rights jurisdiction of the Sri Lankan Supreme Court, which enables a woman aggrieved with executive or administrative action to petition this Court for just and equitable relief and any discriminatory act that results in an infringement of the fundamental rights chapter can be impugned without any distinction.

Mr President,

You would appreciate Sri Lanka is a country which boasts of a multiplicity of personal laws reflective of its multi ethnic polity and the concerns about the discriminatory elements of these personal laws cannot be addressed without the engagement and participation of all communities since any change is likely to intrude into sensitivities.

In order to address these issues, committees headed by Supreme Court judges have been appointed with a view to reforming these laws and they are currently engaged in an intensive process of dialogue with respective communities to amend these personal laws.

Mr President,

As we brought to the attention of this Council last week, under a Presidential directive, a Cabinet sub-committee assisted by the Attorney-General has been appointed to fine-tune the formulated draft National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and make recommendations to the Cabinet expeditiously in order to come out with a feasible and time-bound action plan for implementation. As a constituent component of this Action plan, the Cabinet sub committee will examine the legal framework, policy and practice for gaps in the protection of women's rights with a view to making recommendations to ensure the equitable access to services in health, education and employment for women, while also addressing the issues surrounding regional disparities in access which affect certain groups of women, such as those in rural areas.

Finally Mr. President, my delegation looks forward to continuing this dialogue during the consideration of Sri Lanka's 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> periodic report under CEDAW next year.

Thank you Mr. President