

## Statement by Ms. Zaid Mesfin



Director-General of the National Union of Eritrean Women during 62<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women New York, 14 March 2018

Madam Chairperson,

On behalf of the Government of the state of Eritrea, I am honored to address the 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women on the priority theme: "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls".

I would like to express my appreciation to you and the members of the bureau for conducting the business of our session in an effective and efficient manner.

I wish to pay tribute to all women who fought and continue to fight for women's equality. Let me equally pay tribute to Eritrean women for their enormous sacrifices in the liberation of the country and in the emancipation of women. Women's overall status in today's Eritrea is the result of the efforts and investments made during the liberation struggle by all freedom fighters. However, gender inequalities persist, and we as women and the government are determined to address the obstacles to the full realization of gender equality.

Madam Chairperson,

Eritrea's actions in the promotion of women's rights are guided by :

- ensuring gender equality and women's rights in political, economic and socio-cultural spheres;
- protecting equal participation of women at all levels;

- securing equal payment for the same job;
- guaranteeing women's equal access to land;
- ensuring gender mainstreaming into line ministries, institutions and private sector; and
- strengthening the National Union of Eritrean Women as the women's machinery to advance women's rights.

In order to identify and narrow down the existing gender gaps, the government of Eritrea has formulated gender sensitive policies and legislations in all sectors with the NUEW acting as the principal accountable body on the issues of women at both national and international platforms.

Madam Chairperson,

Eritrea is a signatory to international and regional conventions and declarations, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. Accordingly, Eritrea has met its reporting obligations by presenting the fourth & fifth reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 2014, and it has also submitted reports on Beijing +5 and Beijing +20 to share the progresses and gaps in its efforts to implement the 12 areas of concern articulated in Beijing Platform for Action.

Eritrea's National Gender Action Plan of 2004-2008 and 2015-2019 provide the framework for mainstreaming gender in all sectors and allows to measure the progress of the development of Action Plan for effective planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects that aim at empowering women. Some line ministries who took initiatives in consultation with NUEW have set clear and achievable Gender Mainstreaming Strategies (GMS). As a result of the common endeavor and coordination with partners, the following achievements have been thus far observed>

- maintaining the provision of free and compulsory basic education to all, and creating alternative routes to children from pastoral communities who fail to enroll at the right age;
- increasing the number of female participants in schools at all levels, including at the tertiary level;

- transforming the status and livelihoods of rural women through targeted developmental projects;
- developing specific health policies that address the gender issue at various levels of the rural communities;
- increasing the role of the media to reinforce the combat against stereotyping, underage marriage, FGM practice, and violence against women;
- expanding the Saving & Micro Credit Program (SMCP) under the ministry of national development to support female-headed households and women entrepreneurs to be economically self-sufficient
- reactivating the NUEW's Credit Program which has been able to loan to nearly 12,000 beneficiaries in four administrative regions of the country;
- supporting women farmers with agricultural inputs, such as water pumps to encourage irrigated farming;
- removing barriers for girls to go to school by introducing the Donkey and Water canvases project, mainly initiated to alleviate the fatigue of fetching water in remote areas with profound impact on girls and women's lives over the last decade;
- building partnership at multilateral and bilateral levels. The Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework (SPCF) between Eritrea and the UN, aims at integrating policies on the advancement of women and gender equality in all the projects under the supervision of the Eritrean Ministry of National Development; and
- increasing budgetary resources from government and partners for the NUEW that works on advancing women and gender equality programs.

Madam Chairperson,

In spite of the stated progress and significant achievements, the issue of gender equality is still faced with some challenges. For instance, Article 581-329 of the Eritrean civil code states that the minimum age for marriage for both girls and boys is 18. However, early marriage is not uncommon in the rural areas, among less educated and those with lower income.

In the rural areas, families emphasize on the physical maturity and the start of menstruation as the key indicators of fitness for marriage. Moreover, although there are committed young women professional in all administrative and managerial levels within the strata of the government, promoting and empowering more capable women is critical not only for the betterment of women and girls, but also for the overall societal advancement.

Madam Chairperson,

Let's join hands in removing all the barriers our rural communities face, and allow me Madam Chairperson, to conclude by expressing my delegation's best wishes to the successful conclusion of the 62nd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Thank You!