Statement by H. E. Dr. Masoumeh Ebtekar
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In the Regional Review of the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
Status of Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran:
Forty years after the Islamic Revolution, 25 years after Beijing Declaration
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\textit{In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the merciful}

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Government of Thailand and ESCAP for convening this important event. I am proud to be one of the delegates who had attended the Third World Conference in Nairobi 1985 and the Beijing Conference in 1995. We have witnessed over the course of these intervening 34 years, how the conditions of women worldwide and in Asia has developed and how the efforts and perseverance of both government and civil society actors has changed the livelihoods of millions. We have witnessed how Asian societies improved in many dimensions and indices have changed for the better in many areas including my country, the Islamic Republic of Iran. We have all also witnessed how war, internal strife, sanctions, aggression and foreign intervention has aggravated poverty and targeted the most disadvantaged in our societies.

Trends of urbanization, slum and suburban populations has changed the face of Asia, while employment generation schemes have taken many women out of the vicious poverty cycle in some countries and creating success stories and
examples for others. Democratic processes and economic growth are impeded by insecurity, coercive unilateral measures, war and terrorism in many areas particularly West Asia. Climate change, environmental degradation is also taking its toll on natural assets and targeting livelihoods and families across Asia. Although civil society momentum is gaining in most areas, the scale of devastation in all areas mentioned requires a more serious mobilization and synchronization of efforts to counter negative trends.

Forty years after the Islamic Revolution we have set many milestones in the quest for betterment and advancement for women, even though we still face numerous challenges and obstacles to surmount. We have recently produced a report on the 40 year trends of 40 indicators for women's status. This report can serve as an assessment of the coming trends, reveal an objective image of Iran and serve as a tool for planners and decision makers.

Education and awareness has always been the key to social advancement and women have played a major role in Asian societies. In the Islamic Republic of Iran women's literacy has risen from 34% in 1976 to 89% in 2019, while 38.6% of our girls were left out of school in 1976 now only 3% in remote areas and villages still lack access to primary education. Active schemes to identify and recruit children left out of school are now underway.

**Madam Chair,**

Iran has hosted more than three million refugees for the past four decades and provided quality services for these populations. Hundreds of thousands of refugee children are now granted free schooling and benefit from all services given to Iranian children. Very little of this is recognized by the international community while illegal economic sanctions are successively imposed.

In higher education now, for at least a decade, more than 60% of those gaining access to free college education are women and they outnumber men in most fields. 27% of our academic faculty and 37% of the physicians in Iran are women. Current schemes are underway introducing employment oriented skills training for high school and college graduates.
Primary health care for all Iranians has led to a drastic reduction in maternal mortality rates bringing Iran to 9th place in global ranking. Improved health and nutrition has led to a 25 year increase in life expectancy for Iranians after the Revolution. Life expectancy for women is 76 years four years more than men and their average height has increased by 10 cm.

Political participation is high among Iranians. They have taken part in elections every year after the Revolution. In most cases approximately 50% of voters have been women. Even though only 6% of the parliament is female, they have held between two to four seats in the cabinet.

President Rouhani decreed in 2017 that by the end of his four year term, 30% of the government decision making posts have to be allocated to women. The Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs has advocated, promoted and monitored appointments of women during the past two years. We have witnessed a 35% increase in appointment of women managers rising from 13.6% in 2017 to 18.8% in 2019. We now have 76 women up from 30 in 2017, in top level decision making offices including deputy ministers, local governors, deputy governors and ambassadors. Annual score cards for Ministers and Governors have been provided for this measure.

Economic participation of women in Iran is not adequately and properly reported due to the high rate of unofficial and home based activities of Iranian women. 41% of government employees are women, 40% of agricultural products are produced by women, 80% of handwoven carpets and 75% of beautiful handicrafts are produced by women in Iran. We are currently implementing local employment generation schemes for women heads of households and for young college graduates enabling them with entrepreneur skills. 12,000 women are trained annually to establish new businesses and recruit young women looking for jobs.

We have a campaign of "Women Against Sanctions" underway in Iran. The objective is to support women entrepreneurs who are working in spite of the very difficult economic conditions due to illegitimate sanctions imposed by the US government, thereby waging economic warfare on our nation. We have conducted two rounds of nationwide polling for women entrepreneurs and
the third round is underway; 20 of those gaining the most votes in both villages and urban areas, are eligible for special loans for their businesses.

The Government has supported employment generation schemes in the villages. In recent years, 40.1% of the low interest loans provided to rural areas have been granted to women who have set up their businesses and recruited the unemployed. We have supported a scheme for training women farmers to produce standard and organic products by lowering the use of fertilizer and pesticides, more than 17,294 facilitators have been trained in this area. We have also supported the establishment of 4,200 small scale rural and nomadic funds for women, both providing loans and training villagers for sustainable agricultural practices.

Lifestyle and consumer patterns are also addressed by the Government, collaborating with NGOs. We have initiated several campaigns addressing sustainable consumption patterns for water, energy and food waste. "Women and the Footprint of Water" is a nationwide campaign for changing water consumption patterns involving civil society activists.

Legal modifications within the framework of the Sharia have been underway to secure women's rights and protecting the family during the years after the revolution. We have submitted six bills to the government and a law granting citizenship rights to children of Iranian women wed to foreign men has been approved. Another law to reinforce punishment for acts of acid attacks has been adopted recently as well. A comprehensive bill on Protection of Women Against Violence is also under final adoption in the Cabinet.

A nationwide network of Social Emergency and Intervention Centers and the #123 emergency hotline as well as Social Services Database is now functional in 600 centers providing 24/7 services in cases of domestic violence, child abuse and suicide. These services are supported by a network of charities and NGOs who are providing quality services.

Empowering civil society has been a major strategy for our government. The Vice Presidency supports a network of 2,700 NGOs in women children and family areas. Training and advocacy programs for regional groupings of NGOs
are underway and 1,000 NGOs have received four days of training on project proposals, management, volunteer and local community interaction skills.

For family coherence, we have initiated a National Family Dialogue to promote communication skills among members of the family. The first phase of this scheme has been implemented in 31 provinces, delineating the major challenges families face. Schools, education centers and colleges are also involved in an intergenerational dialogue to promote more understanding among members of the society.

**Madam Chair,**

A major strategy stipulated in law and national plans, and which we have pursued is the promotion of gender equity in Iran. We have developed indicators of gender equity in eight categories amounting to 176 indices on education, health, sports, economic participation, political participation, social integration legislation, and security. On the basis of these indicators, and an atlas of local aggregate gender statistics, each province was instructed to draw up a Provincial Plan for the Advancement of Women and Family. Fifteen out of 31 provinces to date have adopted their plans in the provincial planning committees.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has remained free and independent in today's world in spite of decades of foreign intervention, coercive measures, economic sanctions and a vast campaign of misinformation it is advancing in many dimensions, including that of the status of women. The objective is to smear the image of a country that does not submit to imperial domination and does not follow the model of western development and its culture that is facing a serious deterioration of values and mores due to its sheer material and consumerist nature. They are attacking our beliefs, our dignity with a disinformation campaign and psychological war alongside the economic war. Our nation however is resilient and will overcome.

Today, 25 years after Beijing, we still face many challenges, yet we have many success stories to share with the global community. We believe that our paradigm of development and women's advancement, four decades after the
Revolution, can provide many lessons for Asian and societies of other continents.