United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing + 25 Review Conference

27-29 November 2019 – Bangkok

Agenda Item 2

Statement

By

H.E. (Mrs.) Samantha K. Jayasuriya

Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UNESCAP, Bangkok
Chairperson,

Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,

It is with great honour that Sri Lanka joins this Ministerial Meeting, and conveys warm greetings of the new Government following the 2019 November Presidential Elections. The Government of Sri Lanka has been committed in achieving the goals of Beijing Platform for Action, and it is indeed timely to take stock as we reach the 25th Anniversary and next Review of BPfA in 2020.

On enabling the legal and institutional frameworks for the effective implementation of the commitments enshrined in Goal 5 of the SDGs on Gender Equality and empowering women and girls, a National Women’s Policy has been introduced which provides an overarching framework on gender equality and women’s rights, guiding future developmental policies and strategic interventions by the Government. The National Plan of Action to address Sexual and Gender Based Violence, The National Human Rights Action Plan (2016-2021) are in operation with the support of a cross section of stakeholders and a regular monitoring mechanism. The Action plan for implementing Security Council Resolution 1325 is also being prepared.

With regard to empowering women and ensuring their active participation in development, the Government has made conscious decision to enhance facilities for child care within work places by utilizing Government funds including introducing policy and guidelines for running day care centers and offering preschool education. With the participation of private sector, institutions such as crèches have been encouraged to provide quality services. In order to bridge the gender gap in female labor force participation, more attention has been paid to raise awareness among students, parents and teachers on encouraging girls to participate in vocational training, and as of 2018, female participation in the job market has increased to 40% from 32%. The Ministry of Women Affairs has steered the equitable utilization of resources by directing 25% of its budgetary allocations on investments in rural women’s economic development. Micro financing for enterprises by women has been accelerated over the past several years to enable them to develop SMEs.
The Government adopts zero tolerance policy against sexual violence. Tangible action through establishing Committees to prevent and address Sexual harassment at work places under the Gender mainstream programme has seen progress. Legal amendments to the Domestic Violence Act have been proposed while awareness raising campaigns through media is taking place on eliminating harassments in public transports. Law reforms are ongoing to criminalize cyber violence as a form of sexual harassment, broadening the definition of torture to recognize sexual violence as a form of torture and also to criminalize marital rape.

The Cabinet has approved amending existing domestic laws in order to permit instances of medical termination of pregnancy in special circumstances such as rape, incest and fetus impairment.

Sri Lanka is committed to improving the situation of war affected women and in 2015 a policy on durable solutions for displaced persons to address vulnerabilities, especially of women and children has been introduced. The Office of the Missing Persons was established by a statute and Certificate of Absence has been issued to the families of missing persons. The Office for National Unity and Reconciliation has developed intervention programs on language, education, a political dialogue for reconciliation and established grievance units. Action has also been taken to include segments on peace and reconciliation into school curricula.

Marking a major progressive step in enhancing participation of women in politics, a 25% quota for women in Local Government Councils has been introduced and as a result, the Local Council elections held last year, 1919 women were elected to the local government bodies. Advocacy, including a Memorandum has been circulated among political groups persuading them for adopting a similar quota in Parliament elections.

In ensuring equality, action is being taken to safeguard the rights of women with disabilities through providing economic opportunities, sensitizing through dialogue with line ministries to look into their issues and raising awareness among the field staff to identify and address their needs at community level.

Consultations has been launched to change of personal laws applicable to different communities while respecting their cultural and social identity, through sensitization and inclusive dialogue with respective communities and civil society organizations. The government has approved amending the discriminatory provisions in the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act, and the work is entrusted to the Department of Legal Draftsman.
While the Government is committed to preserve gender equality and empowerment of women the patriarchal attitudes deeply embedded in the society and stereotyping remains key challenges to the realization of comprehensive gender equality, which needs to be addressed through education and awareness.

Sri Lanka reaffirms its commitment to implement the targets enshrined in Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals and the BPfA ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women and girls by year 2030.

I thank you