

(19) Sri Lanka

**Statement of the delegation of Sri Lanka at the Annual Day Discussion on
Women's Human Rights: Empowering women through education**

Mr. President,

At the outset, my delegation wishes to thank the panelists for their valuable contributions to the topic of this discussion, which is a very timely initiative of the Human Rights Council.

Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women has been a focus of successive governments, while maintaining a gender neutral recruitment policy supported by Constitutional guarantees of equality. We have witnessed a remarkable improvement in the situation of women which has been made possible due to the increased sensitivity to their gender issues and a firm government policy that seeks to empower women and address their grievances. 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.

Mr. President,

In Sri Lanka, education is viewed as a basic right and is supported by a Government policy that has made schooling compulsory for those between 5 – 14 years. According to the 2006 statistics, 50.14 % of the school population was girls and of the teaching cadre, 69% were women.

Sri Lanka has almost achieved the second MDG of achieving universal primary education. While enrolment figures are marginally higher for boys in primary school level - 51% as opposed to 49% for girls - the figure is higher for girls at junior secondary level - 51% as opposed to 49% for boys.

Mr. President,

With regard to the tertiary education, the higher number of women completing tertiary education is translated into higher participation of women in the formulation of government policy, holding public office and in this sphere performing functions at senior levels. Overall, there has been an appreciable increase in the percentage of women among the total number admitted to Universities in Sri Lanka. By 2005/2006 in each of the subject streams other than Physical science, higher numbers of women were admitted although their percentage out of the number of women that qualified for admission, was lower in all the streams other than the Arts stream. This is an indication of the level of performance. This adequately demonstrates higher educational attainments by females.

Women's representation in University has increased rapidly and the only subject areas in which they are markedly under-represented are in Engineering (20.4%) and Computer Science (33.3%). For the first time, policy and programme documents have been made gender sensitive integrating concerns in the same manner and have also underscored the importance of reducing the gender imbalance in enrolment in technical and vocational education institutions. These measures continue to empower women in Sri Lanka in spite of the traditional norms that influence stereotyping gender-based role in employment.

Mr. President,

These measures have had a salutary effect on the overall literacy rate in the country. The present literacy rate for women is 89.9 percent and Men 93.2 percent yielding a gender differential of 3.3 percentage points. The ratio of literate women to men among the youth, between 15 – 24 years, stands at 101 women per 100 men demonstrating that the literacy rates of young women has surpassed that of men.

Mr. President,

As we have just highlighted in brief, we have integrated the Millennium Development Goals into the national development agenda and have already achieved goals relating to equitable primary education, child mortality and maternal mortality, access to safe drinking water and literacy, is on target to reach the remaining indicators.

Finally, we believe that the investment in education has, as its ultimate objective, the increase in national income, reduction of poverty and the promotion of human development.

Thank you.