



**OPENING STATEMENT TO BE DELIVERED AT
THE 59TH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE
ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
(CEDAW)**

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

29th October 2014

BY

HER EXCELLENCY

DATIN PADUKA HAJAH ADINA BINTI OTHMAN

DEPUTY MINISTER OF CULTURE, YOUTH & SPORTS

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

CHECKED AGAINST DELIVERY



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Thank you Madame Chair

Bismillahir Rahmannir Rahim

Assalamualaikum Warahmatulahi Wabarakatuh and a very good morning to you all

Madame Chair Ms. Nicole Ameline,
Members of the CEDAW Committee

On behalf of the Brunei Darussalam delegation, I thank you for this opportunity to present Brunei Darussalam's initial and second report on our status of implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We assure you of our full support in our endeavour to share with the international community

our experiences and challenges towards promoting and protecting the rights of women in our country.

Madame Chair

Let me begin by introducing the Brunei delegation. With us are representatives from various stakeholders in the Government and non-Government sectors who play pivotal roles in ensuring that the rights of women are promoted and protected in their respective sectors. They include representatives from the Permanent Mission of Brunei Darussalam to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Prime Minister's Office, the Attorney General's Chambers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Royal Brunei Police Force, the Labour Department, the Immigration and National Registration Department, the Council of Women of Brunei Darussalam, as well as representatives from our national women machinery i.e. the Community Development Department. The Community Development Department comes under the portfolio of my ministry which is the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

Madame Chair,

Brunei Darussalam acceded to CEDAW in 2006. Even before 2006, we had in place our national mechanisms to promote and protect women's rights. Consultations with all relevant stakeholders from the public and

private sector were conducted to consider whether to accede to CEDAW. A task force was established after Brunei Darussalam acceded to CEDAW, whose main task was to ensure the implementation of CEDAW and the preparation of our initial and second report. In the preparation of our report, close and frequent consultations with relevant stakeholders were held within the Government and non-Government sectors including our civil society such as the Council of Women of Brunei Darussalam, the Women's Business Council and the Aids Council. This is to ensure that all agencies that had policies affecting women had the opportunity to discuss their issues and also be accountable for their programmes. This multi-party commitment also ensures that all stakeholders have ownership and are committed towards the implementation of CEDAW. This cooperative effort has thus produced our combined initial and second report which was submitted in April 2014 while responses to the list of advanced questions were conveyed to your good office in June.

Madame Chair,

Before we begin, allow me to touch briefly on the historical, social and cultural background of Brunei Darussalam so that members may be able to place into perspective the contents of our initial and second report.

Brunei is an old Malay kingdom, whose history can be traced back to more than a thousand years ago through Chinese records. The current system of Malay Islamic Monarchy goes as far back as the 14th century

and the present Sultan is the 29th in the line of this dynasty. Brunei was once a maritime nation with trade links to China, India and the Arab world. Brunei was a vassal state of the great Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit Empire in the 14th century and also paid tribute to the Ming Chinese Dynasty. The coming of Islam in the same century eventually led to the golden age of Brunei in the 15th to 16th century, at which time the Brunei Empire included the whole island of Borneo and part of modern day Philippines. The coming of the Europeans led to the gradual decline of the Brunei Empire till its present day size in the 19th century. The multi-cultural and multi-religious influences which Brunei had contact with during the 14th to 19th century resulted in the assimilation of different cultures, values and religions, which has led to the evolution of Brunei into what it is today – a nation where people of different cultures, race and religion live in tolerance, understanding, peace and harmony. In 1888, Brunei became a British protectorate and with it came the British administrative system, the common law and another set of values. Brunei Darussalam gained full independence on 1st January 1984.

Madame Chair,

Islam is the official religion of Brunei as embedded in the 1959 Constitution and its amendment of 2004. With Muslims making up the majority of the nation, Islam is a reality and way of life for the majority of the people of Brunei. Non-Muslims can practice their religions in peace and harmony and this is also enshrined in the Constitution.

Syariah law has been in existence in Brunei Darussalam since the 14th century. The objective of the Syariah Law is to create a society where religion, life, intellect, property and lineage are preserved and protected. The first Syariah law known as Hukum Kanun Brunei, a combination of Syariah Law and Malay customs, was implemented in the late 16th century. This law incorporated, among others, Islamic family law and Islamic criminal law. The first Syariah Laws in the modern legal format, were the Courts Enactment 1908 followed later by the Religious Council and Kadi Court Enactment 1955 passed during the British Residency period, and the Islamic Family Law of 2000. With a unique legal infrastructure where the common law system runs in parallel with the Syariah law system, the entering into force of the Syariah Penal Code Order in May 2014 will further strengthen the existing laws on maintaining peace and stability in the country. The process of justice, which has always been maintained in Brunei, will continue in accordance with the laws, be it in the Civil courts or the Syariah courts. This will ensure that the Rule of Law is always preserved, and the fair and free administration of justice is always protected.

In the social cultural context, Brunei Darussalam has a close-knit society that lives in religious and racial harmony. Inter-ethnic marriages and strong inter-cultural relations have strengthened social cohesiveness that promotes peace and tranquillity. The majority of the population is Malay, which continues to uphold and practice the traditional extended

family system. Our strong family institution, which revolves around mutual responsibilities, provides the traditional support system and continues to be the most reliable social protection system for the nation. The family institution is the foundation of the social fabric of society in Brunei and every aspect of our social life revolves around the family.

Madame Chair,

The core policy of the Government of Brunei remains very much people-centred in all aspects, both in terms of material as well as spiritual needs. Local administration is made up of villages and mukims (group of villages). Every village has an elected leader, who reports to the District Office. Some of these village leaders may be responsible for as many as 30,000 residents; some as little as 100. These village leaders administer and coordinate the provision of basic necessities for the welfare and needs of their community members. Some of them are members of the Legislative Council, representing their respective districts, as required under the Constitution. With this administrative set up, we can ensure that the members of our community receive due care and attention. For instance, payment of old age pensions and welfare benefits have to be channelled through these village leaders and they are required to deliver these pensions and benefits to recipients at the homes of recipients. By doing this, they have the unique opportunity to interact with their constituents and be abreast with the welfare situations of the people they serve.

Madame Chair,

We are very blessed as our people continue to enjoy living in a peaceful and harmonious environment. This has been the reality since time immemorial and carried through during the 30 years of our full independence. This will continue to be our thrust as we strive towards the realisation of our National Vision 2035 to become a nation with highly educated, skilled and successful citizens, who will attain a high quality of life in a dynamic and sustainable economy.

Madame Chair,

Brunei Darussalam has a small population of 406,200 with a per capita income of US\$38,890. Our Human Development Index is ranked 30th out of 187 countries, which reflected an increase of 15.1 percent since 1980. This progress has been attributed to increases in our life expectancy at birth by 7.7 years, mean years of schooling by 2.6 years and expected years of schooling by 3.1 years. Despite only comprising 48% of the total population, our women surpasses men in two of the above indicators. In 2013, our female life expectancy at birth was 80.5 years compared to that of male at 76.7 years, while the expected years of schooling for females was 14.9 years which surpassed the expected years of schooling for males at 14.2 years. Our Gender Development Index, which measures gender inequalities in health, education and command over economic resources, stand at 0.981. With the positive contributions that women can make, Brunei Darussalam cannot afford

not to harness the full potential of our women towards the national, regional and international development of the community at large. This has long been acknowledged and reflected in our national strategies and policy directions. The quality of life of the people of Brunei has enjoyed quantum leaps over the decades and this can be attributed to the equal access both men and women have in terms of basic needs including education and health.

Madame Chair

Allow me to update the Committee on our recent developments, the most significant being the endorsement of five national action plans by the ministerial-level National Council on Social Issues, as recommended by their respective Special Committees. These action plans are the Plan of Action on Women; the Plan of Action on Family Institution; the Plan of Action on Poverty Eradication, the Plan of Action on the Elderly and the Plan of Action on Persons with Disabilities. All these National Action Plans are currently being implemented and will impact positively on the development of women in Brunei.

The National Plan of Action on the Elderly encompasses action lines under 9 headings as follows:- Policy and Legislation, Health, Participation in Society, Education, Employment, Access to Infrastructure, Recreation and Research. The National Plan of Action on the Persons with Disabilities encompasses action lines under 10 headings as follows:- Advocacy, Protection, Health, Education,

Employment, Financial Security, Participation, Volunteering, Accessibility and Transportation. The National Plan of Action on Poverty Eradication encompasses action lines on 10 headings as follows:- Education, Health, Employment, Capacity Building, Housing, Entrepreneurship, Transportation, Strengthening the National Mechanism, Financial Assistance and Security and finally, Policy and Legislation. The National Plan of Action on the Family Institution encompasses action lines on 6 headings as follows:- Strengthening Family Institutions, Work and Family Balance, Economy, Information, Health and Education.

With regard to the National Action Plan on Women, the strategic objective is to develop women's optimum potential through gender equity, capacity building and self-development. This Plan of Action outlines several action lines under 8 priority areas as follows:-

1. Women and Legal Rights
2. Women and the Economy
3. Women and Health
4. Women and Employment
5. Information /Research on Women
6. Women and the Family Institution
7. Women and Work Life Balance; and
8. National Mechanism for Empowering Women

One of the action lines under the Women and Legal Rights is to review existing legislations, policies and regulations in order to ensure that gender perspectives are taken into consideration in existing policies and in the formulation of future policies. Other action lines include to increase women's participation in the economy through capacity building so as to enhance employability and develop entrepreneurship; to support women's roles and responsibilities at home and at work to achieve work-life balance; assistance to single mothers; and to conduct research regularly on the status of women's development in the country in order to provide reliable source of information for policy interventions to better address women's needs. All these National Plans of Action have action lines, key performance indicators and deliverable milestones. The Plans of Action are accessible to the public online.

On average, the Special Committees including the Committee on Women and the Family Institution meet quarterly. However a recent mandate from the higher authorities directed that the ministerial level National Council on Social Issues and the Special Committees must meet monthly to improve efficiency, effectiveness and acceleration of the implementation of the Plans of Action towards the realisation of their strategic objectives.

Madame Chair,

In terms of education, we recognize that education is the ultimate empowering tool for all including girls. The education sector receives

the second highest allocation of almost 13% from the current national budget. This sizeable investment has impacted positively on women's educational attainment which has surpassed their male counterparts in tertiary and pre-university levels. In the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2014, Brunei is ranked 7th in terms of Enrolment of girls in Tertiary Education.

Recent developments in education include the introduction of the Brunei Technical and Vocational Scholarship Scheme in Local Private Institutions. Under this scholarship scheme, Brunei citizens, regardless of gender, can enjoy a full sponsorship of tuition fees with monthly transportation allowance. The Scheme provides more options for school leavers with low grades who now have the opportunity to increase their skills before entering the work market, thus lowering their possibilities of joining the ranks of the unemployed. Since it was launched in September 2011 until September 2014, a total of 8,058 young people have benefitted from the Scheme, and of this 4,117 or 51% are females.

The Ministry of Education is also currently implementing its newly transformed technical education in Brunei to make it more relevant and more sensitive to the needs of industry. Another development is the review of the 21st Century National Education System (SPN21) which includes inclusive education for the disabled. The Ministry is also considering increasing the length of compulsory formal education from the current 9 years to 12 years.

Madame Chair

In terms of health, our maternal and childcare health provision has been in place since 1939. In recognition of the growing needs for specialised healthcare for women and children for the State, a dedicated Women and Children's Block in the State Hospital Complex has been constructed and completed, and is expected to be fully operational in November this year.

Another recent development is the Mental Health Order 2014 which replaces a 1929 enactment. This legislation adopts a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency focus of mental health management. New measures under the legislation encompass the treatment pathways from first admission into hospital as a voluntary or involuntary patient, acute treatment in hospital, rehabilitation and community treatment. This will ensure provision of high quality care to those needing it whilst respecting the welfare and needs of the individual.

With regard to employment, a Workplace Safety & Health Order came into force on 1st August 2013. On unemployment, a recent development is the establishment of a National Working Committee on Unemployment which has approved a number of resolutions for action, with key performance indicators, timelines and delivery milestones. The assertive and positive resolutions of the Committee have succeeded in reducing the number of unemployed from more than 18,000 in 2012 to the current rate of 11,000.

Madame Chair,

This brings me to an issue that is close to the hearts of every working mother in this world – the need for work-life balance. We are witnessing women increasingly sharing the responsibilities of becoming the breadwinners of the family. As a case in point, women’s labour force participation in Brunei has increased from 58.8% in 2001 to 62.9% in 2011. While we rejoice this positive development, this advancement also means that women have to work harder at juggling home responsibilities and work obligations. Their pivotal role in strengthening the family institution has now put them in a delicate situation where striking a balance while juggling work and home responsibilities has become one of the most challenging tasks faced by women today. Technological innovation that makes 24-hour connectivity and accessibility possible has inevitably encroached on the time they should spend with their families. As a result, effective parenting and good family values are jeopardized.

To address this concern, a Work-life Balance Programme was recently launched for both male and female civil servants. The training modules of the workshop include, among others, effective parenting skills, communication skills, time management, financial management and how to prioritize between work and home responsibilities. The workshop will be conducted quarterly targeting different levels within the public service and will also be extended for employees in the private sector. This programme is intended to promote work-life balance as a

culture that can harmonize these two necessities, as well as in acknowledgement of the significant contribution of women in building a solid foundation for national development that starts from home.

Madame Chair and Members of the CEDAW Committee,

Brunei Darussalam is fortunate to be part of an international community that is fully committed and dedicated towards the promotion and protection of women rights. Since becoming a full-fledged member of the United Nations on 21 September 1984, Brunei Darussalam has garnered a wealth of information and experience through joint projects and programmes on gender-related issues. Regionally, Brunei Darussalam has also made great strides in this area. During Brunei Darussalam's Chairmanship of ASEAN in 2013, ASEAN Leaders endorsed, among others, the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children and the ASEAN Declaration on Social Protection. Both declarations are crucial documents that would guide our work towards ensuring the protection and welfare of our vulnerable groups, particularly women and children..

In closing, on behalf of the delegation of Brunei Darussalam, I would like to avail myself of the opportunity to renew our pledge to abide by the principles of CEDAW. However, there are challenges which affect the degree of our fulfilment of obligations. One key challenge arises from the fact that we have a small population and the level of technical expertise on gender issues. There is also a need for more sex-

disaggregated data. There is a need to enhance capacity building in carrying out gender mainstreaming, gender responsive budgeting, gender responsive policy analysis and advocacy. These are areas where we need assistance from UN bodies to provide training for our human resources. Despite all these, we will endeavour, to the best of our abilities, to enhance our national machinery for women and our non-governmental bodies dealing with women issues through capacity building of our human capital.

Madame Chair and Members of the CEDAW Committee,

I am pleased to have shared with you Brunei's efforts to promote and protect the rights of women in Brunei. As we strive towards the advancement of women in Brunei, we look forward to working more with UN Women and other international organisations towards this end. On behalf of my country's delegation, I would like to express our appreciation to Madame Chair and to all members of the CEDAW committee. We look forward to hearing your views and comments.

Thank you