

**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT**  
**BY**  
**H.E. TEKEA TEFAMICHAEL**  
**PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF ERITREAN WOMEN**  
**OF THE STATE OF ERITREA**  
**AT THE 60<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE ELIMINATION**  
**OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**  
**26 FEBRUARY, 2015, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND**

*Madam Chairperson,*

*Distinguished Members of CEDAW Committee,*

Eritrea welcomes the 60<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which include the agenda on the combined 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> periodic reports of the State of Eritrea on the implementation of CEDAW.

It is an honor for me and my delegations to participate in today's constructive dialogue and engagement with the aim of finding common ground for the advancement of women and certainly contribute in devising beneficial recommendations that are country specific. I also feel privileged to present this introductory statement on behalf of the Eritrean government.

I would also like to acknowledge the commitment of the State of Eritrea once again, towards affirming the advancement of Eritrean women and its dedication towards implementing the provisions of the Convention. Eritrea acceded to the CEDAW without any reservation, soon after its independence in 1995 and commissioned a high level delegation led by the then president of the NUEW to participate in the Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing, China.

Eritrea have submitted its 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Periodic Reports in 2012 and 2014 respectively, and responded to the list of issues and questions on the reports in November 2014.

In the process of preparing the reports, extensive participation of all key stakeholders (Ministries of Education, Health, Agriculture, Labor & Human Welfare, Local governments in the six regions, Ministry of justice i.e. Judges and Attorneys, the Media, gender focal points within the ministries and private sector institutions, academic institutions, members of Regional Assemblies and local governments, youth & workers organizations and most of all women members organized under the National Union of Eritrean Women ( NUEW), was ensured.

It has become nearly two decades since CEDAW was acceded to by the State of Eritrea, and since then it has been widely disseminated among Eritrean women including through translating in two local languages with the aim of reaching women at all levels. I would like to assure you, therefore, that Eritrean women are of course aware of their rights under the Convention, though further efforts of public awareness will still be required. The ministry of information have launched gender based public awareness initiatives called ‘*Sidra*’ & ‘*Norit*’ promoting female role models, sharing best practices and combating gender stereotyping respectively.

The process of preparation of the report by itself has been a learning curve and an awareness raising opportunity since it involved women at various levels. On top of this, the convention as well as all periodic reports and recommendations are used as awareness raising documents and are part of public awareness program by government institutions, by NUEW reaching women circles at village levels and all gender focal points across the board through workshops, seminars and training of trainers programs.

***Madam Chairperson,***

The National Union of Eritrean Women was established in November 1979 with the aim of empowering Eritrean women and fostering their participation in the national liberation movement and social justice, was a major step in our history. Henceforth, it was explicitly depicted in our Constitution, that ‘ *the Eritrean women’s heroic participation in the struggle for independence, human rights and solidarity, based on equality and mutual respect, generated by such struggle will serve as an shakable foundation for our commitment to create a society in which women and men shall interact on the bases of mutual respect, solidarity and equality*’.

NUEW was later on in 1995 commissioned by Presidential Notification to act as women’s machinery for the advancement of women and represent the government of the State of Eritrea

with regards to women's issues both locally and internationally and to promote and monitor women's rights and equality through close coordination and cooperation with concerned government sectors, national associations and the community at large.

NUEW benefits from a vast network of organization reaching 90% of villages in the six regions administrations cutting across all ethnic groups in the country. Every woman and young girl above 16 years of age is organized under its umbrella ranging currently over 300,000 women members.

The National Union of Eritrean women has recently conducted its 7<sup>th</sup> national congress in September 2014 were about 430 women delegates from within and the Diaspora have participated. The participants carefully evaluated the achievements scored and challenges encountered in the critical areas of concern and renewed once again their commitment, to protect their rights and to promote the advancement of Eritrean women, the girl child and the rural women in cooperation and coordination with line ministries, local governments, national associations, People's Front for Democracy & Justice (PFDJ).

At this historic event, H.E. the President of the State of Eritrea acknowledged, *“the role of Eritrean women and their organization, NUEW, as an organized force of the people's army during the armed struggle and their current role in protecting their sovereignty, national reconstruction and development endeavors.”* It was also noted that *“the government will ensure that Eritrean women acquire knowledge, skill and familiarize themselves with modern technology to become part of the productive force of the country.”* In his key note, H.E. the President has also emphasized, *“enhancing the participation of women in the Eritrean Defense Force will also be considered”*.

This will be a unique situation, which shall be instrumental in shaping the mind set of male counterparts in favor of women's equality and equal participation.

***Madam Chairperson,***

***Distinguished members of CEDAW Committee***

In less than 20 years of its sovereignty, Eritrea has managed to lead the way to social transformation and economic development of its people by uniting its diverse ethnic groups. In tandem with the overall national socio economic progress, particular efforts has been made in advancing women's rights , consolidating their role and making them to be part of the productive work force grounded on equal footing with men. To this end considerable and important progress has been made so far, nonetheless, it has not been an easy way and without challenges. We assure you that, we remain committed to tackle those challenges and to ensure the fulfillment of women's rights in line with the Convention.

To complement our reports, on this occasion, I wish to share the progress made and challenges faced in advancing women's right across the board and protecting their rights.

***Madam Chairperson,***

With regards to policy, laws and regulations, right after the National independence, the Transitional Government of Eritrea revised all laws & regulations that thwart women's rights and any act that violates their human rights or limits their role and participation was then prohibited by law.

Proclamation No.1 of 1991 is the first proclamation, proclaimed right after the national liberation, to exclude all discriminatory clauses and connotations and to include protective legal measures in the Transitional Code of Eritrea (TCE). To mention few:

- Marriage is based on the free consent of both partners, and needs no parental consent. The legal age for marriage raised to 18 years from 15.
- Women can enter into marriage freely and are afforded equal rights as men.
- Bride price and abduction became prohibited by law.
- Articles 708-721 of the colonial Civil Code, on irregular unions, have been abolished because they do not provide any legal protection of women's rights upon marriage, divorce and succession.

- Rape is punishable under the law with a maximum sentence of imprisonment of up to 15 years. Pornography and other indecent and obscene exposures are also punishable under the penal code.
- Article 635, which bluntly glorified the marital power of the husband, was automatically repealed and was replaced by Art.45 of EPLF's family law which recognizes the equal rights and status of both the sexes, and keeps the interest of the children and mother of the family.
- Proclamation No.58/1994 of land tenure abolished the traditional land tenure system and gave equal right to land ownership to women.
- The Labor Proclamation No.118/2001 has been legislated providing women of legal protection in employment including equal pay for work of same value.
- The Citizenship Act was proclaimed under Proclamation No.21/1992 states that, Eritrean nationality can be acquired by birth, by naturalization, by adoption and by marriage. All traditional and customary laws were revoked and practices such as a child born out of wedlock, a child from non-Eritrean father cannot acquire or confer nationality from his mother, were instantly ruled out.
- Proclamation No. 86/1996 on the establishment of local government that ensured 30 per cent of the seats in the Regional Assembly will be reserved for women and that women will also contest the remaining 70 per cent.
- The National Service Act No.82/95 was proclaimed in 1995 indicating that all Eritrean citizens above 18 years of age regardless of sex has the obligation to serve in national service. Obviously, by virtue of Article 6-8 of the Proclamation, all citizens who attained the age of 18 and above shall have the obligation to render national service for eighteen month. Nonetheless, due to the no-war-no peace situation in Eritrea; which the UN-Security Council, should bear its responsibility to bring about an end to the ongoing border occupation by forcing the occupier regime to abide by the final & binding Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC). Therefore, to the interest of national security, the national service obligation of all citizens might go beyond the stated time zone.

- In 2007 Proclamation No.158/2007 prohibiting the practice of Female genital Mutilation (FGM) was proclaimed.
- In 1994 & 1995 two important international conventions i.e. CRC (convention on the rights of the child) and CEDAW were ratified and enforced respectively. The Convention on Transnational Organized Crimes with its protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children and the Convention Against Torture, were acceded to in September 2014.
- Eritrea is also signatory to seven ILO's core Conventions covering eliminating all forms of forced or compulsory labor; effective abolition of child labour; equal remuneration for work of equal value; elimination of discrimination in respect of employment.

***Madam chairperson,***

Gender mainstreaming is a means of ensuring gender equality and representation in the national development process right across the board. To this end Action Plan to mainstream gender in government ministries has been established comprising generally the following objectives:

1. To ensure gender mainstreaming and incorporate it in mission statements, policies and laws of the Ministry;
2. To raise gender awareness and develop gender mainstreaming capacity;
3. Institutionalise gender mainstreaming to promote women to key positions and to ensure gender sensitive recruitment approach;
4. To collect and analyze gender disaggregated data for decision making and programme development; and
5. To adequately resource gender mainstreaming strategy.
6. Monitor & evaluate effectively the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategy and conduct research to determine outstanding gaps and impact of the strategy.

To foresee the implementation of these objectives, gender focal points in Ministry of Health, Education, Information, Land Water & Environment, Agriculture, Transport & Communication and Trade & Industry have been appointed by their respective Ministers and gender mainstreaming strategies developed. The rest of the ministries will follow suit.

Eritrea is one of the few countries who have achieved great progress in attaining MDG goals way before the targeted year, 2015. Tremendous outcome has been registered in the Area of Maternal Mortality Rate, Child Mortality Rate, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria & other deceases and basic education for all. These achievements that cut across government institutions have of course direct implication for the full realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and could be correlated with gender mainstreaming as well.

Acceding CEDAW Convention and implementing its provisions as well as implementing Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is actually complying with Goal 3 of MDG, i.e. *‘to promote gender equity and the empowerment of women’* which, the government of Eritrea is already committed to. Eritrea Country report, review and appraisal, of the implementation of Beijing declaration and Platform of action (Beijing +20) is prepared and has been submitted to the UN.

Currently, a team of experts from relevant ministries including the National Union is preparing the current report on the status of Millennium Declaration, of which goal 3 will be addressed.

***Madam Chairperson,***

National development policy of Eritrea gives priority to the disadvantaged population in the rural area by narrowing the gap between the rural & urban. Hence, new health facilities, KG & Primary schools, roads and bridges, transport services, potable water pumps or taps, *‘Adhanet’* baking ovens (energy saving improved traditional oven), rural toilet facility in most of the villages, electrification programs, construction of dams etc.....have been put in place, which benefited girls and women in the rural areas. Resettling scattered villages thereby establishing large towns enjoying education, health, communication and other facilities is one of the successful community development programs undergoing in the rural areas which is changing the life style of the rural woman and the girl child.

The other effective measure taken is the provision of agricultural tools, high breed seeds, agricultural plots of land, technical assistance, provision of goats and chickens, donkey & water canvas etc. to women in rural areas, which has empowered them to become self sufficient.

Women heads of households in rural areas have 32.2% access to land distributed for various purposes (housing land, commercial agriculture, and commercial enterprise). Comparatively speaking the lowest rate in terms of accessing land by women was for commercial agriculture purposes. This is dependent on the entrepreneur capacity of women to invest in commercial agriculture.

Eritrean women in general and the rural woman in particular also are benefiting from the credit and loan (village bank) program. Over 52.7 thousand women took loans of 260 million Nacfa (local currency equivalent to 1.7 million USD) in the last five years, both from Savings & Micro Credit Program (SMCP) of the government and National Union, which had helped them to be self employed. NUEW contribution in this program is rated over 15%.

***Madam Chairperson,***

In the political and decision making domain, our approach is a bottom up system that ensures mass participation of women at community level that will ultimately result and influence decision making at higher levels. In this regard, notable step has been registered. Women hold average of 34% at village level leaders, at County (Kebabi) level 11%, regional assembly level 27-34 %, National Assembly 22%, a total of 399 women serve as community court judges comprising 22.5%, Ministers 18%, Governors 16.7%. Although women constitute more than 41% of all administrative and clerical positions, and more than 29 % of junior professional positions, their ratio in the professional category is only 11.6 %. Much will be done to improve the current status by conducting leadership training program intensively to build leadership confidence among women and raising their awareness to cast their vote for women candidates during election periods.

***Madam Chairperson,***

Violence against women and stereotypes & harmful practices, originate from the patriarchal system and economic backwardness of a society. And it obviously vanishes with economic development and prosperity and the establishment of progressive social values.



Traditionally, rape and sexual harassment against women are considered immoral acts that are seriously sanctioned by Eritrean community. And according to Eritrean laws, any trafficking and sale of women and children for gain or to gratify the passion of another is a criminal offence against Morals and the Family, and is punishable by law.

Currently, certain traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), underage marriage and insignificant rape cases still exist.

According to the Eritrean laws rape is a criminal offence: *“Who ever compels a woman to submit to sexual intercourse outside wedlock, whether by the use of violence or grave intimidation or after having rendered her unconscious or incapable of resistance is punishable by law ”*. FGM is prohibited by law and it is being implemented successfully. Under age marriage is still practiced, however, widespread campaign and public awareness initiatives are ongoing by the relevant ministries and NUEW as well.

***Madam Chairperson,***

With regards to affirmative measures: The government of Eritrea believes that the affirmative action is a temporary special measure aimed at accelerating the equality between men and women. Certain measures taken so far:

- Reserving 30% of the seats for women in District /Regional, National Assembly.
- Allocating rewards in cash and in kind to parents in the remote areas who would send daughters to primary schools
- All development projects proposed from community would grant funds, only if women’s interest and participation are explicitly incorporated i.e. 50 percent of the beneficiaries must be women etc.
- Land Tenure committees, water management committee and other rural development initiatives should include women.
- Employment oriented technical and vocational training courses are specifically organized for women to ensure their participation in non-traditional jobs.

- To keep the gender balance and encourage girls participation in higher education, slightly lower entry rate (if 2 for boys 1.8 for girls for instance) in university, nursing school, technical school, teachers training institutes ( in order to recruit more female teachers) ... are introduced.
- One seat is reserved for women in the Community Court judges.
- All Sport Federations to reserve seat for women etc...

***Madam Chairperson,***

The Government's education policy in addressing the gender disparity is: to "ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic and secondary education of good quality", as well as to "narrow the gender disparity in literacy by increasing women's participation in literacy programs." Based on this policy, incredible work has been conducted registering improvement in enrollment and completion.

Eritrea is signatory to Education For All (EFA) Dakar Declaration, the government has developed the national Frame work for Action on education for all. Children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a whole course of Primary schooling.

Female enrollment in 2012 in colleges has reached i.e. school of medicine is 25.9%; in Social science 24.9%; in Business & Economics 33%; in Agriculture 37.1%. This is a great jump compared with 2008. The net enrollment gap in middle school among boys and girls has also narrowed from 4.1% to 2.9%, Secondary level from 6.5% to 4.6%.

We believe that one of the paramount strategies in advancement of women's' right is participation of girls in education. Special efforts such as opening girl's boarding schools & hostels in the remote regions, mobile schools in nomadic area, encouraging role model girls with free school uniforms, bicycles, teaching aids and other incentives, free distribution of sanitary towels for menstrual hygiene for the needy girls have been taken; so that girls will not miss classes monthly because of this. A new advocacy program will be launched in middle and high schools on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in Eritrea, targeting over 166,000 girls over 10 years of age enrolled in 1282 schools, leading to a more supportive school environment, reducing social and physical barriers for girls.

In the adult education program majority of the participants are women. For instance; in the year 2011-2012, a total of 51,704 students were enrolled and 39,780 of them completed of which 93.1% were women.

***Madam Chairperson,***

The National Health Policy (NHP), which was updated in 2009, comprises a number of specific policies that have dealt with the gender issue at various levels. These include the Primary Health Policy, the Health Promotion Policy, the Rural Sanitation Policy, the Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy, the HIV/AIDS Policy and the Human Resources Development Policy.

Guided by these policy major targets has been achieved. The maternal mortality rate decreased from 998 per 100,000 live births in 1995 to 240 per 100,000 births in 2010, 35 % of births were attended by skilled health personnel. Antenatal service coverage increased 48 per cent between 1998 and 2012, to 65.7 per cent. Health facilities with functional emergency obstetric care increased from 40 per cent in 2004 to 82.3 per cent in 2012. And currently, the Ministry of Health is actively engaged to properly address the prevalence of breast, cervix and uterus cancer by establishing a Cancer Treatment Centre.

Coordinated advocacy work of partners, MOH, NUEW, Youth etc is also carried out to tackle the issues of underage marriage, teen pregnancy and FGM of which all contribute to maternal mortality and morbidity. In 2010, the prevalence of female circumcision among women generally is 68.8 per cent, compared with 89 % in 2002. Notable changes in the prevalence has been registered right after its prohibition by law showing under 5 age 12%, under 15 age 33% confirming a decline in the FGM prevalence rate among young girls, a promising trend.

***Members of CEDAW Committee***

Like any other country, Eritrea encounters challenges in promoting advancement of women's equality, and this is mainly due to:

***One***, the level of the socio economic development of the country, traditions & social norms and stereotyped mind set.

***Two***, the over decade long continued border occupation and sanctions have also their own negative impact in the enjoyment of the basic human Rights including the right to live in peace.

On top of this, the UN sanction and unnecessary pressure inflicted are challenges that are derailing the country from undertaking its national development programs that will expedite promoting women's equality in all walks of life. Moreover, the recent resolutions that have resulted to the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea by the Human Rights Council may not be understated as it will certainly create a challenge to Eritrean Women in the enjoyment of their entrenched rights under the convention and general human rights law.

***Madame Chairperson Distinguished Members of the Committee,***

In the last decade, some young Eritreans of both sexes like other fellow Africans have fallen trap in to networks of Human Trafficking and smugglers. This heinous crime that is still likely to continue has been a challenge and is being fought by the Government through dismantling the networks and conducting awareness raising steps by bringing perpetrators in front of public, cooperating with neighboring countries to curb the phenomena. Eritrea has also requested the Secretary General to establish an independent fact finding mission to verify who is behind human trafficking networks. To materialize this idea, the Government has acceded to the Convention on Transnational Organized Crimes with its protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children in September 2014.

Nonetheless, regardless of all these challenges, the Government of Eritrea is principled to ensure women's advancement and to protect their rights, by establishing legal frameworks, raising awareness, building capacity, and mainstreaming gender in all its developmental policies, projects & programs and by sticking to its self-reliance policy in its development efforts and nation building.

We believe that, women's equality could be fully attained with socio-economic development and modernization of the country, increased institutional capacity and most of all creation of emancipated girl child and woman, who can stand, break the silence and fight for her own rights.

***Madam Chairperson,***

The government of Eritrea will continue to work earnestly to fulfill its obligations under the Convention, make unremitting efforts to implement the basic state policy of equality between men and women, and continue to promote gender mainstreaming, in an effort to provide a

highest degree of protection to the rights and interests of women and promote the all-round development of women.

*Madam Chairperson,*

*Distinguished members of CEDAW Committee*

In conclusion, I thank you for following my introductory statement carefully, listening with concern and interest and my delegation will listen attentively to the observations and recommendations of the Committee.

We look forward to engaging in a constructive and genuine dialogue in the next session.

*I thank You, Madam Chairperson.*