



**The State of Eritrea**

**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY H.E. TEKEA TESFAMICHAEL  
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**75<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF  
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

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*Madam Chairperson,  
Distinguished Members of CEDAW Committee,*

Let me take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to represent my country, the State of Eritrea, with the distinguished members of the delegation, to participate in the 75<sup>th</sup> session organized by the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Eritrea welcomes the 75<sup>th</sup> session which includes the consideration of the 6<sup>th</sup> periodic report of the State of Eritrea. It also acknowledges the role and contribution of the CEDAW Committee in the global effort to guide the collective endeavor in women equality and empowerment and the follow-up of CEDAW.

The Government of the State of Eritrea once again, reaffirms its commitment to the advancement of equality and empowerment of Eritrean women and enhances the implementation of the provisions in the Convention. Eritrea acceded to the Convention in 1995 without any reservation and has submitted its periodic reports with diligence, including the 6<sup>th</sup> Periodic report submitted on March 2019, covering the period of 2013 - 2017.

It is indeed an honor for me and my delegation to participate in today's constructive dialogue through the consideration of the report at hand with the aim of strengthening engagement and international cooperation for the advancement of women equality and empowerment efforts. Eritrea is ready to consider and respond to any concrete and objective recommendations forwarded taking into account Eritrea's context, needs and human betterment ideals.

**Let me now introduce the Delegation**

*Madam Chairperson,*

In the above context, highlighting from where Eritrea came, where it is now and the attendant inherent values that drive the nation building aims is central to

understanding Eritrea's reality as a nation and a society in particular on the issue of women equality and empowerment.

The significant and unprecedented heroic role and sacrifice of Eritrean women for peace, security and development during the National Liberation Struggle for independence and in the aftermath as an independent nation since May 24, 1991 is an embodiment of the central values that drive the essence of nation building in all aspects. Women constituted about 33% of the total force during the National Liberation Struggle. Their significant role both in number position and contribution in socio-political and socio-cultural, military and security as well as developmental and administrative institutions decisively impacted in the success of the struggle for independence. Furthermore, the National Service Proclamation of 1994 has also ensured equal participation of women in the ongoing nation building effort and asserting their significant contribution in the peace, security and sustainable development of the nation.

*Madam Chairperson,*

The present report is considered at a very historic moment of an emerging peace in the Horn of Africa Region after almost two decades of turmoil that affected regional peace, security and development. Signing of peace, friendship and cooperation agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia has marshaled a new dynamics in the region. Moreover, the lifting of the UN sanctions on Eritrea in 2018 is also a welcome development. The Eritrean people have paid huge sacrifice to achieve this new reality of peace and the Eritrean Government has seized the opportunity to build a new reality of hope and development both at national and regional levels and so far significant progress has been registered. Eritrea's paradigm of development in the present reality is being consolidated **along two**

**dimensions** namely, the internal dynamics of progress and engagement and international cooperation. It is believed that this new reality and dynamics will have a great influence to the advancement of women equality and empowerment in Eritrea.

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Distinguished Members of CEDAW Committee,*

It is worthy to mention that this session is taking place at a moment when the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the NUEW and the declaration of CEDAW were recently celebrated in November and December 2019 respectively. Eritrean women embrace this occasion remembering the martyrs (both men and women) who paid their precious life for national independence, social justice, equal right and opportunity and women emancipation. NUEW today is a reality as an Eritrean women's organization with over 350,000 members including in the Diaspora, spearheading the struggle for women's equality and empowerment with great zeal and importance.

This inclusive, broad based establishment drives the national commitment and effort in the advancement of women's equality and empowerment and the inherent values of liberation, freedom and justice. In this vein, NUEW is mandated by the Government to promote gender equality and empowerment and functions in coordination with sector ministries, commissions, government agencies and other national associations. It officially represents the Eritrean Government and the Eritrean women at national, regional and international platforms on matters that relate to women's agenda.

*Madam Chairperson,*

To advance a systemic approach on the matter, the latest **National Gender Action Plan** (NGAP) covering the period of 2015-2019, was developed in 2014 as a drive to sustain the goals and achievements. The priority areas identified were education, health, economic empowerment, environment, political decision making and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. NUEW annual activities are based on the NGAP and its five years impact analysis is expected to be conducted in 2020.

Accordingly, the gender mainstreaming program in all ministries is in progress. Presently, seven ministries have mainstreamed women's equality and empowerment including necessary representation in their national development programs. Progress is also registered in the ministries of Agriculture, MLSW and MoH to review and develop their data collection system that ensures gender disaggregation.

*Madam Chairperson,*

Women's issue is a social issue giving responsibility to everybody in the Eritrean society. The preparation of the report thus called for a broad participation of all stakeholders. NUEW earnestly mobilized and coordinated the follow up of CEDAW implementation, preparation and consultations on the 6<sup>th</sup> CEDAW report in collaboration with various stakeholders including line ministries, Local Governments in the six administrative regions, members of Regional Assemblies, Youth and Workers national associations, National Associations of Persons with Disabilities, academia, private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs) and UN Agencies based in Eritrea.

To this end, an inter-sector working group encompassing relevant ministries coordinated by the NUEW led the process at various levels of the report. **Regional (Zoba) level symposiums** helped to assess the status of women in the respective administrative regions with the participation and contribution of regional governors, regional assembly members, sub-regional administrators, national associations, religious leaders, anti FGM/UAM committees and other interest groups in the regions have significantly contributed.

**Consultations with the UN Country Team in Eritrea and the technical support** provided through an international expert to familiarize the harmonized reporting guideline and report drafting mechanism greatly contributed to the process.

*Madam Chairperson,*

Eritrea is a State Party to 6 out of the 9 core human rights treaties. In 2019, the State Party ratified the ILO Convention 182, on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. Furthermore, and as part of its regional commitment, the State Party presented its initial and combined report to the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), covering the period 1999 and 2017, considered during the 62<sup>nd</sup> regular session.

The Government of the State of Eritrea acknowledges Resolution 1325 as an important instrument in promoting women's equitable participation in the promotion of peace, security and development. In this respect, a national consultation workshop conducted on October 2018 highlighted the **essence, relevance and implications** of the basic provisions reflected in the Resolution. An inter-sectoral training program was further organized by the NUEW in partnership with UN Country Team in Eritrea in November 2018. Both the consultation

workshop and the training showed that more efforts have to be exerted to examine its **essence in the given national context** and reality as well as considering the emerging dynamics of regional peace and cooperation. Hence, more inter-sector consultations will be planned until the end of 2020.

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Distinguished Members of CEDAW Committee,*

Government's **National development policy** takes **equity** considerations and gives priority to the disadvantaged **rural areas**, vulnerable social groups and ensures equitable distribution of wealth, resources and opportunities. Today, new health facilities, schools, road infrastructure, transport services, construction of dams for irrigation, provision of clean, potable, tap water, toilet facilities, electrification etc. are established creating significant benefit to girls and women in the rural areas. On the other hand, as part of the integrated rural development programs, **voluntary resettlements** of scattered, remote villages have created tangible socio-economic gains and necessary public services.

In general, the social sector strategy that promotes the right to dignified life and human betterment has shown promising progress in particular in rural areas of Eritrea. Some of the notable examples of improvement include: **Life expectancy** from 48 in 1990 to 67 in 2018; **number of schools** from 132 in 1991 to 1987 schools in 2017; **health care** provision within 10 km radius increased from 46% in 1991 to 80% in 2019, provision of **potable water** is 85% in rural and 92% in urban areas, accessibility to **electricity** reached 43.5%, **road transport** service covers 85% of rural villages etc.

The Government's **education policy** is "*ensuring girls' full and equal access to education and achievement in basic and secondary education of higher quality*". In basic education there is a marked leap in the gender parity index (GPI) at all levels and at secondary level for instance with an increase from 0.76 (in 2012-2013) to 0.91 in (2016-2017).

School **Dropout** is one of the main **challenges** driven by various socio-economic reasons but continuous effort is made to address the problem including by opening girl's boarding schools and hostels in the remote areas; promoting mobile schools and encouraging complementary elementary education (CEE) programs; opening special need schools, introducing Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) programs and raising awareness of and responsibility of communities at large.

*Madam Chair,*

**Availing credit and loan access** to women entrepreneurs is another strategy in the **economic empowerment of women**. About 66% of the total beneficiaries of the national level Saving and Micro Credit Program are women. In 2018 the number of female clients in a variety of projects has reached over 39,000 that involved about **131.3 million Nakfa** of loan.

Equal **access to land use** allotted for habitat, subsistence farming and commercial/cooperative farming is a basic right of women. Agricultural tools, high breed seeds, technical assistance, outreach services, etc. are given to women in rural areas thereby improving their productivity and life style. **Modern commercial farming** owned by women is still at a low stage but is gaining momentum in areas of dairy, poultry, beekeeping, food processing etc. There are **45 organized women cooperatives** embracing 1,141 women farmers (in **121.25 hectare of land**) with significant progress in improving their livelihood.

Participation in **political and public life** is a right given to Eritrean women. **Affirmative action as a temporary tool** to establish a **level playing field** is in place taking into consideration the prevailing gap in the **gender roles and responsibilities**. **Building the professional and technical** capability of women through education and training on the one hand, and introducing reserved **seat or quota in elections** on the other is registering good results. The achievement and improvement at village and localities level elections is significant where a solid foundation for women leaders is laid. The 2019 local election has shown that women hold 56.2% at village level, 37.3% position at locality level and 49.4% in



elected Community Court Judges. An increasing trend is also marked in many of the **appointed higher positions**.

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Elimination of any **forms of violation against** women, stereotyping and harmful practices, is a critical agenda given priority focus. The fact is that, it originates from the patriarchal system and under developed economic situation and hence advancing concrete socio-economic and socio-political as well as socio-cultural transformation based on the progressive values remains central. The mobilization and organization of the community and building capacity through establishing committees for anti-FGM/underage marriage and other forms of violence against women committees, has enabled community level transformations to make progress driven by the pertinent legal/institutional basis and actions.

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In conclusion, it is a solemn belief of reality that women's equality and empowerment in Eritrea will be fully attained through the ongoing, all-round socio-economic and socio-political development, as well as increased institutional and organizational capacity by transferring as a cultural heritage, the values earned through huge sacrifice during the national liberation struggle and in post-independence. These values are reflected in the thinking and practice of equal right and opportunity and are becoming critical to the empowerment of a new generation of emancipated girls and women, to stand up, break the silence and fight for their equal rights. Yes! It is happening, and it will be done!

The Government of the State of Eritrea will continue to work earnestly to achieve this aim by continuously redoubling its effort to implement the pragmatic policies and strategies of development predicated on the inherent legal and institutional

basis outlined briefly in this statement as well as in its reports. It will also work to fulfill its obligations under the Convention.

I thank you for following my opening statement with highest attention and interest. My delegation is ready to engage and discuss on any further issues and observations as well as recommendations that befit the context, needs and human betterment ideals of the Eritrea society in an objective and critical way. We humbly believe that engagement that is dignified and cooperation based, on mutual respect and understanding is critical. We look forward to engaging in a constructive and genuine dialogue during this session and express our readiness to share our modest experiences, challenges, best practices as well as innovative approaches.

*I thank You, Madam Chairperson.*