



## Permanent Mission of the State of Eritrea

### Statement by Semere Azazi

**Delegation of Eritrea to the 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

**On Agenda item 28 (a, b): Advancement of Women**

**At the Third Committee of the Sixty-Fifth Session of the General Assembly**

**17 October 2012, New York**

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive reports on measures taken to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on Women.

My delegation associates itself with the statements made by the distinguished representatives of Cameroon and Algeria who spoke, respectively, on behalf of Group of Africa and Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

It is clear that no country can achieve sustainable development without recognizing the role and the rights of women. The experience of many countries shows that for gender equality to materialize, it is not enough to outlaw discriminatory laws and practices. It requires concerted efforts directed at addressing and correcting the root causes that give rise to gender imbalances. In this regard, not only discriminatory laws pertaining to such as marriage, divorce, succession and land ownership were repelled in Eritrea, but new set of rules were instituted with the objective of guaranteeing women's economic, political, cultural and social rights. Women's equality with men is constitutionally guaranteed without any limitation to their full participation in all spheres of life. The policies and actions of the Government of Eritrea on women and girls is guided by the National Gender Policy along with its Strategic Framework of Action.

The national strategies on gender, education, poverty reduction, health and food security, all respond to the needs of Eritrean women and girls in order to address the underlying conditions that have put half of the population of the country at disadvantage for various reasons. As a result of these strategies there are greater awareness about women's rights and the need to empower women. Women in Eritrea, despite ominous societal and structural constraints, have been able to achieve significant progresses in several areas of concern identified in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform of Action as well as in other fora.

Mr. Chairman,

Whether it is access to education, primary health care and clean drinking water or rural micro-credit, or introduction of improved communication systems and electrification of rural areas, women have been known to benefit the most from such initiatives of the government. The access of women to health,

especially reproductive and child health has reached record levels. The Maternal Mortality Ratio has declined from 998 per 100,000 live births in the period 1986-1995 to 486 per 100,000 live births for the period 2006 to 2010. This figure makes Eritrea one of the three countries in the sub-Saharan Africa that are on track to achieve MDG 5. My delegation is also pleased to report that the government of Eritrea together with the civil society is actively campaigning to the elimination of obstetric fistula by widening the free health services to all, including by establishing maternity waiting homes for communities that live in remote areas. Recently, a referral centre for the treatment of fistula has been established, and in 2011 alone 104 mothers with fistula problems were operated.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation attaches great importance to the elimination of gender based violence. Violence against women is regarded as criminal offense in Eritrea and its punishable by law. Legal counselling services are also provided to protect victims. Open discussions are being held in TV programs and other mass media outlets to address this issue.

Violence against women comes in many forms, including the widespread of female genital mutilation (FGM) in many countries and regions. The statistics of my country show that the prevalence of female circumcision has declined from 88.1 percent in 2002 to 83.0 percent in 2010. The decline is substantial among youngest women (15-19), from 78.8 percent to 68.8 percent and it is also more drastic among girls under five years of age where reported cases of circumcision is only 12.9 percent. The envisaged decline is expected to be strengthened by the existing national law that prohibits the practice of female circumcision in Eritrea which has been implemented since 2007.

Mr. Chairman,

The economic livelihood of over 80% of the Eritrean population is largely dependent on agriculture and the majority of Eritrean women are employed in this sector. Ensuring food security has taken centre stage in the development agenda of the country with the women's full participation. To reduce the dependence on rain-fed agriculture, Eritrea has been spearheading a national campaign to build the necessary infrastructure; including dams, irrigation systems, and feeder roads in the shortest possible time. Very significant progress towards ensuring food security is achieved and the need for external food aid has been offset during the past few years.

Mr. Chairman,

As a country prone to drought and desertification, the introduction of an environmentally friendly cooking stove has made a major contribution to reducing Eritrea's alarming rate of deforestation, reducing the amount of time women have to spend collecting fuel wood, and improving rural women's health working condition. The home-grown technology earned the 2003 Ashden Awards for Sustainable Energy, from an organization based in London.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation wishes to conclude by informing the Committee that Eritrea, in line with article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), has submitted its Fourth Periodic Report few days ago and is awaiting for a schedule to be set in order to engage with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Thank you