

Penyampai : DATIN SERI DR. SITI HASMAH BINTI HAJI MOHD. ALI  
Tajuk : THE PLENARY OF THE UN FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN  
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1. Since the UN Conference on women in Nairobi in 1985, the world has undergone tremendous changes. The cold war has ended. Continuing industrialisation, the technological revolution and global communication have brought dramatic changes and vast opportunities in our lives and the environment we live in.

2. The 21st century can be the era of tremendous vitality and innovation for the creation of a caring world - a world resting on the strong foundation of ethics and morality, a world built around peoples' genuine needs and a world that ensures equal access to resources, choices and decision-making for a decent standard of living for both men and women.

3. Some of us have benefited from the advancements emanating from the forward-looking strategies of Nairobi. But there are multitudes of women around the globe who still face the reality of continuing exclusion. Their problems require urgent attention if we are to achieve equality, peace and development. I wish to highlight three pressing issues: \* Poverty continues to be the root of all evils. Although the world's economy is becoming more globalised and richer overall, the creation and enjoyment of that wealth are very uneven. Beggar thy neighbour approaches favour the industrialised world more than for someone living in the developing world. As developing nations struggle with persistent external debt problems and structural adjustments, the basic needs of the people are hardly met. In those circumstances, more women are thrown into the pits of poverty and they remain the poorest of the poor. Poverty is particularly acute for rural women, female-headed households, indigeneous women, the handicapped, the urban poor and migratory workers.

We urge the main creators and controllers of technology and wealth who have more global reach to also have global responsibility. The need to be caring to our fellow humans cannot be more urgent.

Our capacity to be caring cannot be more optimal. As poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere, we need smart partnership with prosper thy neighbour approaches between the developed and the developing. The debt burden of many developing countries has to be urgently reviewed so that they can be helped to finance the much needed development programmes for their people. Such programmes must be guided by gender-sensitive macroeconomic and sectoral policies which ensure women's access to, control over and benefits from economic resources.

We support increased unconditional official development assistance to poverty stricken areas.

There must also be increased trade liberalisation with access to open and dynamic markets.

\* The family, that basic unit of social structure and well-being, is becoming more and more disintegrated resulting in increasing breakdown of peoples' ability to cope. Rising crime rates, child abuse, violence against women, trafficking of women and children for the sex trade, substance abuse, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, divorce, abandoned babies and old people, and rise in mental illness bear evidence to this seeming paralysis of the coping mechanism.

Women unfortunately are often made the scapegoats. The family has to be preserved and supported. Whilst we recognise women's great contribution to the welfare of the family and development of society, women's sex and their role in procreation cannot be the basis for discrimination. Religion also cannot be misused to justify these practices. The spirit of equality, mutuality and respect in the relationship between men and women is essential for building the foundation of a strong family. The state must help in reducing the gender division of labour between productive and reproductive roles by ensuring a more flexible work environment which harmonises work and family responsibilities for both women and men. Special measures must be adopted to protect those with disrupted families and to assist victims of violence. International cooperation is required to eliminate trafficking in women.

\* Armed conflicts continue to plague many parts of the world. We are very disappointed that an august body like the UN has been rendered impotent in protecting women from extreme violation of their human rights by superpower injustice of colossal magnitude. The continued slaughter, torture, systematic rape and possible obliteration of our Bosnian sisters are occurring in so called UN safe areas, in flagrant violation of the international humanitarian law and security council resolutions ? What human rights are we talking about when people are denied the right to self protection and security? Let us support all international efforts to put a stop to the continuing aggression, ethnic cleansing and genocide in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

We call on the UN to protect and secure the lifelines to all UN safe areas. We support the lifting of the arms embargo unfairly enforced since November 1994. The government of Bosnia-Herzegovina has the legitimate right to request and receive military assistance, so that our sisters will have the right to self defence in accordance with article 51 of the United Nations Charter. As we gather here today, in the 50th year of the UN, amidst the turmoil in many parts of the world, let us work together for better understanding and caring. Government's commitment to women is essential in achieving equality, peace and development. It is with this realisation that the Malaysian Government established a national policy on women in 1989. To ensure its smooth implementation, we have formulated a plan of action which is aimed at enhancing the national machinery, effectively involving women in decision-making, safeguarding their rights to health, education and social wellbeing, removing legal obstacles and discriminatory practices and ensuring their access to and benefits from development, particularly in science and technology.

5. Our lives are intricately woven together. We share a common destiny. We must rise above the differences to constructively and creatively chart this Beijing Platform for Action. It will be the guiding light for all governments and NGOs of the world to be responsible for, and accountable to the women of the world. A caring world is the basic fuel to equality, development and peace. There is no you and there is no I, only a simple we. Investing in the caring world is investing in us.