CHAPTER III
STATUS OF WOMEN – INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are inherent in the human person, they, as well as the procedures for their protection and promotion, apply to all human beings. The goal of full and effective implementation of international obligations in the field of human rights is to enhance the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national level. A wide array of bodies, mechanisms and procedures have been developed and established by the United Nations human rights system for the purpose of strengthening such national implementation. Women’s human rights are enumerated in treaties, conventions, resolutions, declarations and guidelines, promulgated by either the United Nations or a regional human rights body. A de facto discrimination of women has been widely documented for all areas of law and for all regions of the world, albeit with differential variables. Discrimination against women remains rife in practice even where law prohibits discrimination and embodies special measures for the advancement of women.

Having been articulated in the international fora, the women’s issues have conglomerated to seek global attention. The 1950s and 1960s, ‘welfare’ approach was adopted with women benefiting indirectly through the trickle-down effects of economic growth and development. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the integration of women into the development policies and programmes and the new emphasis on a productive role for women in addition to their reproductive one marked the emergence of the “women in development” approach. The 1980s witnessed the beginning of the phase of “empowerment” of women for the purpose of achieving self-reliance and economic independence. In 1990s, the feminist movement
took on new dimensions with the gender paradigm stressing participation, equality and equity, a more integrated and holistic approach to development.\(^1\)

The Charter of the United Nations, adopted in San Francisco in June, 1945, is the first international treaty to refer in specific terms to equal rights of women and men: "The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs." This commitment was stressed in an "open letter to women of the world" from women delegates and advisers at the First General Assembly of the United Nations.\(^2\)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed in 1948 by the General Assembly of the UN and still the cornerstone of the UN’s human rights system, adopted on 10\(^{th}\) December 1948, focussed the world’s attention on the importance of human rights. The development of two major covenants – The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – provided an initial mechanism for compliance with the broad range of human rights.\(^3\)

Various international legal instruments provide extensive protection to women. The Charter of the United Nations states in the preamble that "We the peoples of the United Nations determined... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women...".

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3 The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 defined human rights as rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants being enforceable by Courts in India. This Indian enactment tended to accord an official recognition to the ICCPR besides the ICESCR adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 16, 1966.
Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights", Article 2 further states that “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as...sex...”.

Since the very founding of the United Nations the incessant endeavours have been manifested in the sequence of international conferences and conventions addressing women’s status, rights, needs, promotion and development. Manifestation of violence against women in the form of female infanticide and prenatal sex selection is an obvious violation of human rights of the female sex. The consensus against female infanticide, prenatal sex selection became so crystallised by twentieth century that it has already been embodied in various United Nations Declarations.

In the early years, from 1945 to 1962, the United Nations concentrated on securing equality for women under the law. In 1946, the General Assembly established the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women.4 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948. In 1967, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was adopted.

In 1975, the First Global Conference on the status of Women was convened in Mexico City. It proclaimed the period 1976-1985 the United Nations Decade for Women with the themes of Equality, Development and Peace and adopted a World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the objectives of the International Year of Women (1975). Between 1976 and 1985, the United Nations observed a Decade for Women. This period

4 The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is a body established in 1946 to monitor the situation of women and to promote women’s rights. The commission’s work has been instrumental in bringing to light all the areas in which women are denied equality with men.
brought the crucial new recognition of women as active agents of and contributors to, the development process.

On 18 December, 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and entered into force as an International Treaty on 3rd September, 1981. The text of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was prepared by working groups within the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) during 1976 and extensive deliberations by a working group of the Third Committee of General Assembly from 1977 to 1979. Drafting work within the commission was encouraged by the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objective of the International Women's year held in Mexico city in 1975, which called for a convention on the elimination of discrimination against women, with effective procedures for its implementation. CEDAW has brought to a climax United Nations efforts to codify comprehensively international legal standards for women.

The detailed mandate to secure equality between women and men and to prohibit discrimination against women is set out in CEDAW. This mandate finds its source in core human rights documents – The Universal Declaration of Human Rights; The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, collectively known as the International Bill of Human Rights.

As of 2nd November 2006, 185 countries – over ninety percent of the members of the United Nations are party to the Convention making it one of the most widely adopted human rights treaties in the world. This “Women’s Bill of Rights” is a milestone in the quest of defining the

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universal norms of gender equality. It was the first international legal instrument to define discrimination against women. The Convention also establishes an agenda for national action by countries to guarantee the enjoyment of rights of equality.

The Convention in its preamble acknowledges that "extensive discrimination against women continues to exist" and emphasizes that such discrimination "violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity". It comprises of a preamble and 30 articles and provides a comprehensive framework for challenging the various forces that have created and sustained discrimination based upon sex and defines discrimination as under

\[ \text{Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, ... of human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.} \]

By accepting the Convention, States commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms including:

- to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women;
- to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and
- to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by public authorities, institutions or enterprises.

\[ ^{6} \text{Article 1, } \textit{Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women}. \]
\[ ^{7} \text{Article 2, } \textit{ibid.} \]
\[ ^{8} \text{Article 2(f), } \textit{ibid.} \]
\[ ^{9} \text{Article 2(c), } \textit{ibid.} \]
\[ ^{10} \text{Article 2(d), } \textit{ibid.} \]
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It is the only human rights treaty that is concerned with the dimension of human reproduction, which targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations. The preamble sets the tone by stating that, “the role of women in procreation should not be a basis for discrimination.” The link between discrimination and women’s reproductive role is a matter of concern in the Convention. Special measures for maternity protection are recommended which shall not be considered discriminatory.11 The Convention also affirms women’s right to reproductive choice. It is the only human rights treaty to mention family planning. Under Article 5 the convention imposes obligation on the state Parties to take all appropriate measures:

(a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;12

(b) To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.

The Convention urges member states to take appropriate measures to provide special protection to women during pregnancy in types of work proved to be harmful to them in order to prevent discrimination against

11 Article 4(2), ibid.
12 With regard to Article 5(a), ibid., the Government of Republic of India declares that it shall abide by and ensure these provisions in conformity with its policy of non-interference in the personal affairs of any community without their initiative and consent.
women on grounds of marriage or maternity to ensure their effective right to work.13

The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to and equal opportunities in political and public life including the right to vote and to stand for elections14 as well as ensuring equal access to education15, health16 and employment17.

The Convention aims at enlarging the concept of human rights, as it gives formal recognition to the influence of culture and tradition on restricting women's enjoyment of their fundamental rights. Civil rights and the legal status of women are dealt with extensively. The Convention draws attention to the fact that often women's legal status has been linked to marriage, making them dependent on their husband's nationality rather than individuals in their own capacity.18 Article 16 asserts the equal rights and obligations of women and men with regard to choice of spouse, parenthood, personal rights and command over property. It further states that child marriage shall have no legal effect, minimum age for marriage be specified through legislation and all marriages be officially and compulsorily registered.19

Article 15 emphasizes the full equality of women in civil and business matters, demanding that all instruments directed at restricting women's legal capacity "shall be deemed null and void."

The Convention gives positive affirmation to the principle of equality by requiring States Parties to take "all appropriate measures, including

13 Article 11(2)(d), ibid.
14 Article 7(a), ibid.
15 Article 10, ibid.
16 Article 12, ibid
17 Article 11, ibid.
legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the basis of equality with men". The Convention also stresses the importance of action, including action in the fields of employment and education, to ensure women’s progress in fact as well as in law.

The Second World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women was held in Copenhagen in 1980 for a mid-term review of progress achieved since the proclamation of the Decade. The Copenhagen Conference adopted a Programme for Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women, incorporating national, regional and international strategies for the advancement of women which gave paramount considerations to the full and equal participation of women in the development process. Sub-themes of Employment, Health and Education at the Conference were added to the World Plan of Action which focussed on politics, decision-making, international cooperation and peace.

The Third World Conference to Review and Appraise the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace was held in Nairobi in 1985. The conference adopted the Nairobi Forward looking strategies for the Advancement of Women for the period up to the year 2000. This was another milestone in the advancement of women. The strategies included guidelines for national measures to promote women’s participation in efforts to promote peace and education for peace. The strategies focus on eight areas of critical concern to women, namely: power-sharing, national machinery and institutions for the advancement of women, commitment to women’s rights,

20 Article 3, ibid.
21 Supra note 1 at 117.
poverty, economic participation, access to education, health and employment, violence against women and the effects of armed conflict on women.\textsuperscript{22}

During the Decade for Women these two major conferences – offered a forum in which women’s organizations had a voice in shaping the work of the United Nations. The Decade for Women also brought agreement on the need for practical measures to improve women’s lives.

Women’s rights to be free from violence was crystallized in 1992 when the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women adopted its ground breaking General Recommendation No. 19 framed during its 11\textsuperscript{th} Session on “Violence against Women”. It defines violence against women as a form of discrimination and further notes that gender-based violence which impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms under general international law or under human rights conventions is discrimination. These rights and freedoms include the right to life, the right to liberty and security of person, the right to equal protection of law, the right to equality in the family, the right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health, the right to just and favourable conditions of work.\textsuperscript{23}

It became the normative basis for the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (UNDEVAW) the year after and the creation of the mandate for UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (UNSRVAW). In the early 1990s, violence against women received unprecedented international attention which was reflected in the


\textsuperscript{23} Stop violence against women, at http://www.amnesty.org.nz/web/pages/home.nsf/0/f4335bd603975c13cc256e4a0004a6d6?opendocument
adoption by the General Assembly of a Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women\textsuperscript{24} setting out the mandate for addressing violence against women as a human rights issue. Article 1 of UNDEVAW defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". For the first time definition of violence was provided, including psychological violence. This Conference provided an opportunity for a burgeoning global network of anti-violence activists – Global Campaign for Women’s Human Rights – to achieve policy change among governments at the UN level.

Article 2 of the Declaration presents what the international community recognizes as generic forms of violence against women. The definition encompasses (but is not limited to): physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the community, including battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape; female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women; non-spousal violence; violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment, and intimidation at work and in educational institutions; forced pregnancy, forced abortion, and forced sterilization; trafficking in women and forced prostitution; and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State.\textsuperscript{25}

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights on 25\textsuperscript{th} June, 1993; affirmed the human rights of women and girl child as ‘an inalienable, integral and

\textsuperscript{24} GA resolution 48/104 of 20 December, 1993.
\textsuperscript{25} http://www.unfpa.org/intercenter/violence/intro.htm
indivisible part of universal human rights'.26 The Declaration asserted for the first time that women's human rights must be protected, not only in courts, prisons, and other areas of public life, but also in the home. Progress made in implementing the Vienna Declaration was reviewed at the March-April 1998 session of the UN Commission on Human Rights.27

The International Conference on Population and Development28, held at Cairo, Egypt, from 5 to 13 September, 1994 acknowledged the discrimination on the basis of sex from the earliest stages of life in the form of “son preference” giving way to prenatal sex selection resulting in abortion of female foetuses; higher rate of mortality among young girls, curtailing access of girl children to food, education and health care. It was stressed that “population and development programmes are most effective when steps have simultaneously been taken to improve the status of women”. Women’s empowerment was a central theme of the conference. Recommended actions for governments included prohibiting the trafficking of women and children, promoting discussion of the need to protect women from violence through education, and establishing preventative measures and rehabilitation programmes for victims of violence. ICPD was the first international forum to acknowledge that enjoyment of sexual health is an integral part of reproductive rights.29

The Fourth World Conference on Women30 was held in Beijing between 4-15 September 1995. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW)

27 http://www.unfpa.org/intercenter/violence/intro.htm
29 http://www.unfpa.org/intercenter/violence/intro.htm
contentious. Various new issues were raised and debated for the first time in the international forum such as concept of gender, equity and equality, reproductive health, equal rights to succession and inheritance of the girl-child, trafficking in women, pornography and stereotyped roles for men and women.

It was noted that the advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue.

Among other acts of violence against women were included – forced sterilization and forced abortion, coercive/forced use of contraceptives, female infanticide and pre-natal sex selection.\(^{32}\)

Under strategic objective to prevent and eliminate violence against women; the governments were urged to “enact and enforce legislation against the perpetrators of practices and acts of violence against women, such as female genital mutilation, female infanticide, prenatal sex selection and dowry related violence and give vigorous support to the efforts of non-governmental and community organizations to eliminate such practices.”\(^{33}\)

The Conference affirmed that the human rights of all women and the girl child must form an integral part of United Nations human rights activities. It further emphasized that any harmful aspect of certain traditional customary or modern practices that violates the rights of women should be prohibited and eliminated. All the major international instruments include ‘sex’ as one of the grounds upon which states may not discriminate.


\(^{32}\) Id. at 49.

\(^{33}\) Id. at 52.
It was noted that unless the human rights of women, as defined by international human rights instruments are fully recognized and effectively protected, applied, implemented and enforced in national law as well as in national practice in family, civil, penal, labour and commercial codes and administrative rules and regulations, they will exist in name only.34

Further the Conference under its strategic objective, ‘to ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice’ urged the Governments to provide constitutional guarantees and enact appropriate legislations to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex and ensure practical realization of the principle of equality of men and women. It further called upon the Governments to review national laws, including customary laws and legal practices in the areas of family, civil, penal, labour and commercial law in order to ensure the implementation of the principles and procedures of all relevant international human rights instruments by means of national legislation, revoke any remaining laws that discriminate on the basis of sex and remove gender bias in the administration of justice.35 The Conference was a milestone in the history of United Nations work for women and was phenomenal in several aspects.

The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development adopted by the World Summit for Social Development36 also calls for the promotion and protection of the equal status and human rights of women and children with particular attention to the rights of the girl-child.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court finalized in 1998, has been a significant development in addressing crimes of violence against women. Several forms of violence against women including rape,

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34 Id. at 90.
35 Id. at 96.
sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, sexual violence were included in the Rome Statute as crimes against humanity. In addition, gender based persecution was included as a crime against humanity. The Draft Elements of Crimes outlines gender sensitive definitions of crimes. The Rome Statute contains progressive provisions relating to the participation and protection of victims and witnesses in the process and ultimately for reparation of victims. It also contains progressive provisions relating to women's participation in the International Criminal Court as judges, prosecutors and staff.37

The Rome Statute in Article 7 covers female foeticide within the ambit of "Crimes against Humanity" including the act of 'Extermination' and 'Persecution' on the ground of gender. According to the Statute "extermination" includes the intentional infliction of conditions of life, *inter alia* the deprivation of access to food and medicine, calculated to bring about the destruction of a part of the population. "Persecution" means the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law by reason of the identity of the group or collectivity. Extermination through systematic murder of newborn female infants and through abortion of female foetuses is part of the persecution of women as a class.38

Female foeticide and female infanticide satisfy four out of five criteria set out in the Genocide Convention39, namely:

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39 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, Approved and proposed for signature and ratification or accession by General Assembly resolution 260 A (III) of 9 December, 1998 entry into force 12 January, 1951, in accordance with article XIII.
a) Killing members of the group.
b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group.
c) Deliberately inflicting conditions of life on the group that are calculated to bring about its physical destruction.
d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.

Female foeticide not only matches but also surpasses the worst episodes of genocide in scale. Female foeticide tantamounts to 'gender cleansing'—the extermination of an entire generation of women and by extension, all future generations as well.\footnote{Supra note 38 at 24.}

On October 6, 1999, the United Nations General Assembly in a landmark decision for women, adopted by consensus a 21–Article Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and by 2nd November 2006, 83 States Parties had signed the Optional Protocol\footnote{http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/protocol/sigop.htm}. By ratifying the Optional Protocol, a State recognizes the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – the body that monitors states parties' compliance with the Convention – to receive and consider complaints from individuals or groups within its jurisdiction. The Optional Protocol entered into force on 22 December 2000. The optional protocol to the convention will be an invaluable tool for the implementation of the same. The Protocol contains two procedures: (1) In States that have ratified or acceded to it, women whose rights have been violated and who have exhausted national remedies will be able to seek redress from an international body – the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Its importance lies in the fact that it places the convention on the same footing as other human rights treaties/instruments that have individual complaints procedure as well as inquiry procedure and it puts
pressure on the State parties to fulfil their legal obligations under the Convention. (2) The Optional Protocol allows for the committee’s investigation of individual complaints and also sets up a proactive inquiry mechanism by which the Committee can investigate grave or systematic violations of the treaties at its own initiative.42

The twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for twenty-first century” took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 5 June to 9 June, 2000 and adopted a Political Declaration and Outcome document entitled “further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action”. In his closing statement, the President of the General Assembly remarked that there had been no backward movement on Beijing language and that in several areas the Outcome Document moved the global agenda on gender equality forward. The Outcome Document recognized that the efforts towards ensuring women’s advancement needed to combine a focus on women’s conditions and basic needs with a holistic approach based on equal rights and partnerships, promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.43

A recent addition to the range of international mechanisms with which to oppose violence against women is the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.44 Adopted in 2000, it has an appended

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Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.\textsuperscript{45}

The Millennium Development Declaration is a United Nations General Assembly Resolution adopted by 189 countries on December 18, 2000. Among other objectives, the MDGs focus is on promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health. The MDGs recognize the interdependence of various rights (including women's human rights) to achieving equitable and sustainable development and to eradicate poverty. It explicitly pledged to implement CEDAW along with mainstreaming gender equality and promoting the empowerment of women in all other priorities. UNIFEM states that the MDGs are not meant to be treated as a whole new agenda for women's human rights, but rather they are a new vehicle for Beijing and CEDAW implementation. In September 2000, heads of the state & government met in New York to negotiate Declaration committing the United Nations to achieving and rededicating the Organisation to respect for the equal rights of all without distinction as to race, sex & religion.\textsuperscript{46}

CEDAW sets forth a legal framework for eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of women in society. The Beijing Platform, in turn, expands the obligations of CEDAW and provides a comprehensive agenda for change. The Millennium Development Goals set out quantitative goals and a specific time frame within which they should be achieved. The integration of these three processes provides a coordinated framework within which gender equality can be achieved with the appropriate commitment and determination of both governments and civil society.

\textsuperscript{45} UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons at http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/trafficking_protocol.html

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While the issues covered by the Beijing Platform for Action are well documented, addressing emerging issues is crucial to achieving gender parity and had been prominent during the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration in September 2005:

- Bringing women out of poverty through reform of international financial institutions.
- Eliminating trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation.
- Recognizing the conservative backlash, forming new alliances, dealing with fundamentalism and guaranteeing gender justice.
- Bringing women into the information and communication technology mainstream.
- Increasing the role of women in peace and security matters.\(^{47}\)

In 2005, the international community celebrated over 25 years since the adoption of the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of discrimination and ten years since the 4\(^{th}\) World Conference on Women in Beijing, China adopted the Beijing Platform for Action (i.e. the “Outcome document”). During this period, there has been significant structural progress on the elimination of violence against women as evidenced by the mere existence of CEDAW, the Beijing Platform, the MDGs and a variety of other documents, Declarations, Conventions and Protocols dealing with issue of gender. Each of these initiatives has helped to transform the profile of women’s human rights in the international community.\(^{48}\)

The 10-year International review and appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action took place at the 49\(^{th}\) Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2005, which provided a unique opportunity to the member countries to review their progress against Beijing Goals. In

\(^{47}\) Ibid.
\(^{48}\) Ibid.
addition to reviewing implementation of the Platform for Action; the Commission also discussed current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement & empowerment of women and girls. Although the 49th Session was called a reaffirmation and review, Beijing+10 soon became a search for ways to formulate and strengthen the women's development agenda in preparation for the September 2005 five-year review of the Millennium Declaration a strong statement for women's equality and the less gender-oriented Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).  

The 50th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (27 Feb. to 10 March, 2006) considered the themes: - “enhanced participation of women in development – an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and for the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the fields of education, health and work and equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes at all levels”.  

While most of the tools, institutions and organizations necessary for implementing the Beijing Platform and achieving the MDGs are recognized and available worldwide, women's equality will continue to be a dream until governments bring out the changes needed to give women their full human rights.  

The historic fiftieth session worked as milestone for the United Nations. Over the past six decades, the Commission had played a critical role in shaping women's progress at the global and national levels. It also


helped to develop legal measures and raising awareness of the challenges confronting women worldwide.

It is a challenge before the Commission that how Member States, United Nations entities and civil society organizations could turn to implementation of global commitments for gender equality, using the current momentum of United Nations reform to further advance gender equality.

Public attitudes toward the advancement of women and gender equality have not changed at the same pace as policy, legal, and institutional frameworks. As a result a large gap remains between policy and practice on the promotion of gender equality. Persistent stereotypical attitudes and discriminatory practices need to be addressed explicitly for the full implementation of the platform. To give real meaning to the international commitments and endeavours at the national level gender perceptions have to be changed. A handful of promising practices and successes are not sufficient to reverse the gender inequality and pervasive gender discrimination.