

STATEMENT

by

Ms. Karine Soudjian, Head of Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues Division

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia

Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting

6-7 November 2014

Thursday, 6 November 2014

Item 5

Closing gender gaps through economic and social policies

Mr./Ms. Moderator,

On behalf of my Delegation I would like to thank all panelists for interesting presentations and thank you for providing us the opportunity to share our views on this important agenda item.

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as after 23rd special session of the General Assembly a number of state programs have been implemented in Armenia which include measures aimed at gender equality and advancement of women and effect economic and social policies on reducing gender gaps.

In the second decade since independence, Armenia experienced rapid and impressive economic progress. Between 2001 and 2007, annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth averaged 13 percent, with a visible positive impact on welfare of the Armenian population: poverty incidence was halved from 56 to 27.6 percent, lifting approximately one million people out of poverty; unemployment fell from 36 to 28 percent; health indicators such as life expectancy and maternal mortality improved, but recent economic and financial crises to result in serious setbacks in gender equality and put the gains achieved in recent decades in women's empowerment at risk.

The poverty analysis in terms of gender and age in Armenia shows that women are more frequently below the poverty threshold than men, but the risk of poverty for women is not much higher than that for men. The picture is different in case of women-headed households, as they are considered to be much more vulnerable. They are more likely to fall below the poverty line than other households. The main reason for that is the lower rate of employment among women as compared to men. Hence, the absence of a man as head of the household increases the vulnerability of the family. Due to the economic crises within communities and households, the burden of increased economic insecurity and poverty are likely to be borne heavily by women, who use their assets and stretch both their paid and unpaid work in order to compensate for job losses and resulting declines in household income. Hence, one of the main objectives for the Armenian Government continues to be reducing the risks of poverty within the context of economic crises to somewhat dampen its negative implications on the overall poverty level.

Among the factors that impact the economic situation in Armenia are the blockade of country which has a negative influence on the living standards of the population of the Republic of Armenia, especially its vulnerable groups and on their social and economic rights, including the right to development, which is an apparent violation of the norms of the Charter of the United Nations, the international law, including the Convention on Transit Trade of Land-locked States.

As a consequence of the mentioned blockade every year Armenia suffers losses amounting to tens of millions, in particular, the blockade has serious adverse effect on the growth of export of goods from Armenia, the pricing policy of imported goods, as well as on the Government's efforts to eradicate poverty, in order to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals.

The studies by the World Bank have showed that if there was no blockade imposed on Armenia, the country would manage to settle issues of poverty eradication, its gross domestic product would increase significantly (by about 30 per cent) and the trade deficit would be reduced by half.

Ms./Mr. Moderator,

Policies that promote gender equality can pay off in higher growth and lower poverty - raising women's employment will raise overall employment rate in the economy, which is in turn expected to spur GDP growth. In this context, a diagnostics that highlights gender disparities, the differential impact of policies on men and women, and demographic challenges with a gender dimension is fundamental to inform public policy. It should be noted, that some measures have been implemented there still exist issues that need to be addresses, including the ones related to ensuring rights of more vulnerable groups of women, including refugee women.

In Armenia gender equality outcomes in education and health are broadly comparable to those seen in Europe and Central Asia and OECD countries and better than the group of lower middle income countries.

A large share of young women than young men are enrolled in tertiary education. Unlike in primary and secondary schooling where enrollment gender gap is zero, in tertiary education there is a gender gap with 58 percent of females and 37 percent of males of university age enrolled in higher education. From the point of view of school-to-work transition, it is important to note that these women and men specialize in subjects (social science, education, and health for women and technical fields for men) that lays the foundations for much of the gender-based sectoral, occupational, and wage differences observed in the labor market.

Only 56 percent of women aged 15-64 participate in labor market – a figure slightly higher than the ECA average but 22 percentage points lower than for men in Armenia.

Among the measures that can contribute towards improvement economic activities of women we recommend the following:

- Facilitate school-to-work transition by tailoring content of higher education more closely to the needs of the private sector and hence making university education more relevant for the job market.
- Strengthen active labor market programs, emphasizing job search assistance.
- Promote women's entrepreneurship.

Thank you