

Discrimination Banned in Kenya, Says Minister

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The Minister for Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services Ochilo Ayacko, has re-affirmed the Government's commitment to implement the Beijing Platform of Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

Ayacko emphasized that the Kenyan Government was pursuing the advancement of women in formulation of its policies. Discrimination on the basis of sex was forbidden in Kenya.

Ayacko was addressing the Beijing+10 progress review conference in New York. He said the review of the Constitution sought to protect gender equality and introduced Affirmative Action on the nomination of Members of Parliament. Consequently, the number of female members of Parliament had doubled, and the number of female local authority councillors increased.



Ayacko told the meeting that more girls were now in school following the successful introduction of free primary education recently which made it mandatory for all school going age to enroll. The Minister said the Government had banned Female Genital Mutilation.

Ayacko said increased reporting in the media was drawing attention to the issue of violence against women. Women were crucial to Kenya's national development agenda, he stressed.

He said although women were the major players in agriculture and small enterprises they were constrained from fulfilling their full potential. To effectively address the issue of gender equality, it was important to sustain efforts to attain economic empowerment of women by ensuring equality in inheritance, land ownership, property rights and access to markets. He was also convinced that improved provision of reproductive health services and access to affordable anti-retroviral drugs, with the help of the country's development partners, would give an impetus to the efforts to combat HIV/Aids.

Forty eight more ministers from countries emerging from inter- and intra-state conflicts described efforts under way to shake off the tragedy of war and catapult women to their rightful place in societies, as the Commission on the Status of Women concluded its high-level discussion on implementation of the Beijing agenda.

Bakoko Bakoru Zoe, Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development of Uganda, said that her country had made tremendous progress in several areas of concern identified in Beijing. The country's constitution guaranteed gender balance and fair representation of women in all constitutional bodies, as well as women's economic, maternal and political rights. Political representation of women in the National Assembly stood at 25 per cent in 2003. Women's sexual and reproductive health had been identified as a critical area that would be addressed by the national action plan.

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Uganda had taken a unique leadership role in the efforts to prevent the spread of HIV/Aids and promote treatment, she continued. As a result, the disease prevalence rate had been reduced from 6.8 in 1989 to the current 6.5 per cent. Among other priorities, the Government recognized education and training of women and mainstreaming of gender equality. Violence against women, particularly in situations of armed conflict, continued to be a source of concern. Uganda was committed to the Vienna Declaration on the Elimination of

Violence against Women, the principles of the Women's Convention and the Rights of the Child Convention. Elimination of armed conflict remained among the main challenges faced by the country's women, so that they could fully enjoy their rights and participate in development. Other challenges included provision of financial services for women, particularly in rural areas; improvement of access to markets; and assistance in providing access to anti-retroviral therapy.

Faida Mwangila Minister for Women and Family of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, said her country was emerging from 10 painful years of conflict, yet those were also years in which women had made substantial progress. The Government had established programmes and mechanisms aimed at advancing the status of women and young girls, taking into account the 12 critical areas identified at Beijing. Those had included the establishment of the ministry she led, as well as the creation of mechanisms for women and children in the Parliament. A National Women's Council had also be set up, along with a technical committee charged with formulating strategies to reduce poverty, among its other key tasks. In conjunction with its social parties, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had spared no effort in improving women's conditions countrywide.