

High Commission of India

Lusaka

Celebration of International Women's Day

21st March 2022

Opening Remarks by the High Commissioner

Chairlady of the Lusaka India Ladies Association, Dr. Raji K. P. our Keynote speaker Ms. Rashmi Sharma, CEO of Jewel of Africa, Zambia, members of LILA and other socio-cultural organisations, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Good evening and welcome to the High Commission of India to celebrate International Women's Day 2022. The day is usually celebrated on 8th March, however, due to some unavoidable reasons, we are now able to celebrate the International Women's Day. The theme for this year's celebration is "Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow". This theme is very appropriate in contemporary context when the world is facing various challenges and requiring a common understanding on sustainable development wherein the women have to play a very prominent role. We have observed that women are the most affected section of the society from various global challenges, including climate change. Therefore, there is an urgent need to make policies keeping women at centre stage for a better and sustainable tomorrow.

India has traditionally been known to be a country which revered women. Our ancient texts bear testimony that women enjoyed an equal status at par with men and actively participated in all spheres of life. Regrettably, with changes in socio-economic and

cultural dimensions, the prominent role of women witnessed gradual regression. Our social reformers and leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Savitribai Phule, Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade, Ahilayabai Holkar, Tarabai Shinde, Fatima Sheikh, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar and many others have continued to constantly remind us that the progress of a nation depends upon the progress of women in the society. However, the progress on women issues were not commensurate with time and therefore, we still see a lot of challenges on women empowerment like education, social issues and their economic development were faced by the country and concerted efforts are being made by the Government of India to implement policies to make women empowerment, a reality.

A significant step in this direction was the right to vote for women which became a reality soon after India attained independence. From then on, India has never stepped back in its efforts to ensure equal rights and regard for its women. From the 5th Five Year Plan (1974-78), there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. Over the years, India has brought in legislations to curb the social evils like the dowry, child marriage and triple 'Talaq' etc.

With the rise of both the avenues of education, economic opportunities and overall change in attitude of the society towards women, they are now breaching traditional barriers and showing eagerness to leave their mark in varied sectors and make an impact in diverse set-ups. This is a welcome development and need support from all sections of society. The government of India's policies and initiatives like Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana,

Ujjawala Yojna, Mahila Shakti Kendra, Mahila e-Haat and Trade Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD) Scheme are promoting women empowerment and supporting them to venture into entrepreneurship and overcoming financial and social barriers. Women empowerment and their increased integration into the mainstream society will help in sustainable economic development and building of a just society.

I may mention that during the celebration of the International Women's Day, President of Zambia H.E. Mr. Hakainde Hichilema called upon everyone to spread the message of love to put an end to gender violence.

The proactive policy initiatives of Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi ji towards women empowerment have been helpful in overcoming gender barriers and empowering women to become financially independent. These initiatives are bearing fruits of empowerment of women in various socio-economic sectors like health, education and jobs and therefore contributing in overall well-being of women to build a strong, just and sustainable India.

I look forward for an active cooperation of LILA and other socio-cultural organisations to High Commission in the celebrations of various events of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsava, which will continue till 15th August 2023.

Thank you all. ****