



ITALY

**FIFTY SIXTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

STATEMENT

BY

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(New York, 28 February 2012)

Check against delivery

Madam Chairperson,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Italian Minister of Labour and Social Policies, also in charge of Equal Opportunities, I am pleased to take part in the 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The decision of the Italian Government to combine the portfolios of Labour, Social Policies and Equal Opportunities is designed to strengthen the Government's action to promote equality, since it allows a more unified perspective on areas that are crucial to the empowerment of women, in full compliance with the Beijing Platform.

Italy fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by Denmark on behalf of the European Union. I would like to take this opportunity to illustrate briefly the Italian Government's actions at both the international and national levels.

At the international level, despite budgetary constraints, the Italian government is firm in its commitments to improve the status of women. In this context, we are promoting a series of initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa in the areas of food security, the environment, and health, as well as in the fostering of women's participation in the reconstruction of countries involved in armed conflicts.

To prevent and eradicate female genital mutilation (FGM), which in our country concerns emigrants from African nations, Italy has adopted a comprehensive law that not only prohibits this practices but also mandates a range of prevention measures and support services. The Secretary-General cited this law as a good example of policy. In the international framework, Italy supports the adoption of a General Assembly resolution calling for the abandonment of female genital mutilation. We are confident that in the near future, thanks to the initiative of the African Union, and with the support of the Italian and other Governments, the General Assembly will adopt this resolution. To this end, I am delighted to remind you that tonight at 7 p.m. the United Nations and the Italian Government will host in the General Assembly Hall a concert by the African singer and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Angelique Kidjo, who through this venue is making her own unique contribution to the international campaign to end FGM.

I look forward to seeing you all at this event, which celebrates both music and our common social commitment.

At the national level, allow me to describe the present status of women and the priorities of the Italian Government.

The percentage of working-age women who work outside the home in Italy is less than 50 per cent – 46 per cent to be exact. The figure drops to a mere 30 per cent in the south of the country. More than half of these women leave the workforce permanently when they have their first child, confirming a troubling lack of services and the prevalent role of women in child and elderly care. In the couple, women perform more than 70 per cent of household chores.

The story that these disheartening numbers does not tell is that Italian women are more successful than men in high school and in their university studies. More educated women are determined to play a more prominent role in every aspect of life, including, of course, the labour market.

Even in the agricultural sector, women are no longer relegated to traditional tasks. They are frequently pioneers in innovative and emerging business activities such as agrotourism and organic farming. Yet the traditional division of labour within the family persists and women in agriculture often end up more overburdened than women working in other sectors of the economy.

So there is a clear contradiction between women's drive for more empowerment and the shortcomings of both the legal and the economic systems - as well as the influence of tradition - in accepting their contribution and using it to the greater benefit of the Country. This contradiction is precisely what the Italian government is determined to tackle and eliminate, to ensure a more equal distribution of care work in the family and in society as a whole.

This is why the Government is developing a national plan with a series of projects and actions at the regional level to bring about structural change. Last year a law establishing gender quotas in public companies was passed. Additional measures designed to ensure a better gender balance in both work and the family will be included in the labour market reform being hammered out as we speak.

Through this reform, the Government is strongly committed to boosting the employment of women and other disadvantaged segments of society and to reduce regional imbalances. As with the reform of the pension system, which quickly became law, our approach has been shaped by the pursuit of equality: equality between genders, equality between generations, and equality within generations.

Through this cross-cutting approach, measures to ensure the economic and social rights of women go hand-in-hand with measures to better implement fundamental individual rights. There is growing evidence of violence against women, either physical, sexual or psychological: it is a very real obstacle to economic and professional achievement, since victims of violence or sexual abuse have greater difficulties, mostly of a psychological nature, in fitting into the workplace, bettering their careers, and optimizing their talents.

Policies in this area include the adoption in 2010 of the first National Plan to contrast violence against women and stalking. We are currently drafting the first National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings.

As you can see, our agenda is rich and demanding, while our time is short and difficult. But we are and we will continue to be committed to achieving these goals.

Thank you.