56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century

Statement by Ms. Liina Kinter
Head of the Gender Equality Department
Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia

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Estonia
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Madam Chair, distinguished members of delegations and the civil society,

Estonia aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and would like to make the following comments in our national capacity as gender equality continues to be one of the priority areas of Estonia's activities in the field of human rights, both domestically and internationally. We remain committed to the principle of equality between women and men as a fundamental right. This principle has its roots in our constitution dating from 1920. I am pleased to say that this year we celebrated 90 years of women's suffrage in Estonia.

Madam Chair,

Estonia is committed to increase awareness about the importance of gender equality and has carried out different activities and methods to promote it. Examples include explanatory materials about the Gender Equality Act, pilot gender budgeting project, media campaigns and trainings that have sought to change attitudes of the traditional role of women in the labour market and contribute to the reduction of gender pay gap. As a result of those and other efforts, at the end of 2011 Estonian Parliament has tasked our Government to prepare an action plan to reduce gender pay gap.

Forced prostitution of gender based violence, Estonia has developed a national action plan that has enabled more co-ordinated approach to the violence prevention through the creation of network of government officials and exchanges with non-governmental organisations. Another priority for our society has been the reconciliation of work and family life. Support measures, such as parental benefits and benefits are comprehensively dealt in the new Children and Families Development Plan, adopted by the Government last December.

Madam Chair,

Though only 30% of Estonian population lives in villages, we have special programmes to improve the attractiveness of rural living and quality of life. Unemployment in rural areas is still much more significant problem among the women than it is among the men. To overcome this gap, the Estonian Rural Development Plan (2007-2013) has special indicators to promote gender equality. For example, the decision making on the financial support for small entrepreneurship projects that, in addition to the effectiveness and profitability of the project, the majority of women in their management is also taken duly into account.

Estonian international activities in promoting the rights of women focus on the participation in international organizations, on development co-operation and humanitarian aid. Estonia continues to advocate the incorporation of the gender dimension into all UN activities, so that our pledges for gender equality would become a reality. As women still amount to the largest group of victims in military and political conflicts, Estonia places great importance on the implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 1325 "women, peace and security". We are implementing our national action plan for 2012-2015, and support related activities in the UN bodies and regional organisations where we are members.

Madam Chair,

While the primary focus of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the poverty reduction, the gender disparities within the poor are worrisome and should not be overlooked.

Estonia contributes to stronger equality and empowerment of women through UN programs and funds, including UN Women, UNFPA, UNHCR, [illegible] and UNICEF, also through several humanitarian aid projects, most recently in Central African Republic, South Sudan and Chad.

Though UN documents are essential to improve the situation of women and girls, we all need to do more on the ground, both domestically and internationally. Bilaterally, Estonia has launched several development cooperation projects for women. In this context, I would like to refer to the particular expertise that we have gained in Afghanistan and in Georgia. In Afghanistan we work in Helmand Province on reducing maternal and child mortality by training local women on midwifery and other first aid skills. In Georgia we implement projects that aim at eliminating gender-based violence. This includes support to a psycho-social rehabilitation centre in the war-ravaged region of Abkhazia and capacity development to prevent and tackle domestic violence.

For the conclusion, I would like to reconfirm that while being a member of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), we continue to stay committed to the promotion of gender equality both domestically and internationally.

Thank you.