



IRELAND

Siobhán Woulfe

Ms. Kathleen Lynch, T.D.

Minister of State with responsibility for
Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People

to the

Fifty-sixth Session of the Commission on the Status
of Women of Women

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Madame Coakley...

I am pleased to associate myself with the statement made by Denmark on behalf of the European Union.

I should like to thank you for making this, the 56th CSW...

It is my first occasion since my appointment with responsibility to the Disability, Equality, Mental Health and Older People almost a year ago. This portfolio of responsibilities enables me to address a number of areas of particular concern to women in Ireland in tandem with gender equality issues. I am most aware of the caring responsibilities for persons with a disability and older persons, which fall to women who are frequently called upon to combine these caring roles with their work and own family commitments.

The new Government elected in Ireland just a year ago has made a number of significant commitments in relation to equality, particularly in relation to women in decision-making roles. The presence of women in decision-making roles, particularly in political life, is one of our ongoing weaknesses from a gender equality perspective. The significant increase only brought a very small increase to 15 per cent in the numbers of women in our Lower House. The Upper House in our Parliament now reached 50 per cent.

In order to address the issue of women's representation in parliament, I worked with me to organise a hugely successful series of conferences on women and politics last month. The conference brought together our Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister who jointly lead our coalition Government, the political and administrative leaders of all the political parties. Such a success was the conference that it received international media coverage. This conference also coincided with new legislation which places a target on the State to ensure a candidate quota for women in the next General Election, failing which the State financial support to political parties will be withheld.

The new Government has also indicated to take further steps to increase the numbers of women appointed to State Boards from the current level of 34 per cent to 40 per cent. We are also beginning to engage with business to encourage the appointment of more women to private boards, which are currently only at 8 per cent.

We are currently undertaking a periodic review of it to ensure that it remains pertinent, particularly in the changing circumstances which now pertain in my country.

In Ireland, which has a significant rural population, we must ensure that women living in rural areas have opportunities for economic engagement. Very many women in rural communities in Ireland have established their own businesses, frequently related to agriculture and food production and often with great success, leading to their products being sold on the shelves of the most prestigious retailers internationally. We encourage the transfer of such expertise to other women through positive actions such as the National Women's Enterprise Day Conference which targets a target of over 200 women each year.

Gender equality is also a key dimension of Ireland's overseas development programme. Irish Aid's Country Direct reports the importance of gender equality as an essential component of sustainable human development. Ireland works to advance equal rights for men and women globally, to eliminate gender inequality in access to and control of services and resources such as land and credit and to support women's equal participation with men in political and economic decision-making.

We work with governments in Uganda, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zambia, Timor-Leste, Myanmar, South Africa and others to advance women's rights.

In addition, we work closely with a variety of civil society organisations to advance women's rights and to mainstream and embed gender equality into all their work.

Our bilateral and multilateral support for UN Women. Both our normative and our operational work on gender have the potential to have a transformative

effect on women across the world. Civil Society organisations are also key partners in Irish Aid's work on gender and we focus on supporting local women's organisations in developing countries.

Addressing hunger is a key element of Irish Aid's programme. There are a number of elements to our work on hunger but the issue of gender equality cuts across all of our engagements. We work with partners to increase agricultural productivity in Africa with a particular focus on women who account for up to 80% of food production in most developing countries. Targeting the provision of maternal and child health and nutrition is another important priority.

I can assure you of my Government's ongoing commitment to gender equality in Ireland and in our overseas aid programme, even in this period of economic difficulty, because the achievement of true gender equality is a key element of economic empowerment and growth. It is both right in terms of values and smart in terms of economics.

Thank you, Maureen Clavin

