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Statement by Ms Kadi Viik, Head of the Gender Equality Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia

Mr Chair,

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the European Union and would hereby like to offer the following comments on behalf of Estonia.

The 15 years following the Conference in Beijing mark a period of significant development in the legislative and institutional framework for gender equality and women's rights in Estonia. This framework is based on the Gender Equality Act, adopted in 2004, and complemented by other gender-related legislation. It also includes the establishment of an independent Gender Equality Commissioner, a body dealing with complaints on gender discrimination. Starting from 2009 the Commissioner's mandate also covers other grounds for discrimination, such as ethnic origin, race, colour, religion and other beliefs, age, disability and sexual orientation.

However, the ultimate utility of any normative framework depends on how it is implemented. Our gender equality goals have been translated into a variety of policy documents, most notably the development plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the programme on gender equality promotion. Others include the action plan for growth and jobs, the national health development plan and the national HIV/AIDS strategy.

Promoting the implementation of these goals includes continuing awareness-raising, building cooperative partnerships between the public, private and non-governmental sector and continued mainstreaming of the gender perspective into planning and evaluation processes in other policy areas. As an essential building block in our work, we have focused on developing further the gathering of sex-disaggregated data as well as conducting in-depth studies on various gender issues. A large study on the gender pay gap is due to be published in 2010. Additionally, an extensive study on attitudes and values regarding gender equality is carried out every four years and enables us to receive feedback on our work. Among areas of action, Estonia also considers guaranteeing sexual and reproductive rights and ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services for women crucial for achieving gender equality goals.

Estonia also continues to focus, both nationally and at the regional and international levels, on eliminating violence against women. This includes national legislative measures, including the application of a restraining order. It also includes carrying out studies that help shape future policies. In 2009, a large survey was conducted by Statistics Estonia mapping the extent of partner violence in Estonia. In 2004, Estonia had one women's shelter. Today there are nine shelters around the country. There is also a rehabilitation centre for prostituted and trafficked women and two shelters for trafficking victims. Two hotlines have been established, one for female victims of violence and one on trafficking. All victim support services are run by NGOs, mainly women's NGOs, and partly or fully funded by the government. We find the role of the NGOs extremely important in this field.

Mr Chair,

I would like to draw attention to two particular aspects of these activities: the input of the NGOs and the involvement of men. NGOs have a key role in the implementation of gender policies, as in the example of victim support services. Estonia supported building the capacity of the NGOs as well as NGO-run gender equality projects through a programme funded equally by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Open Society Institute in Estonia. In the next four years we will support gender equality projects with 8 million Estonian kroons from the European Social Fund.

Another essential aspect of Estonia's activities has been the focus on men in gender equality work. This includes studies on male perspective on gender issues, for example regarding policy measures supporting fatherhood and a study of male sex buyers, as well as seminars on the concept of masculinity.

Mr Chair,

The work of the CEDAW as well as the discussions in the CSW involving governments and NGOs provide an important opportunity to review the implementation of our commitments on gender equality and to develop policies to improve this process. Estonia continues to actively support the promotion of gender equality goals in the different UN fora.

Gender equality continues to be one of the priority areas of Estonia's activities in the field of human rights as well as our development cooperation. Our multilateral contributions to the UN programmes and funds as well as bilateral development assistance are aimed to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Increasing health awareness and skills among women in Afghanistan and contributing to the skills development of medical staff are part of our contribution to reducing maternal and newborn mortality – an urgent MDG goal yet to be achieved.

We also welcome the support expressed by all UN member states in 2009 September for the strengthening of the UN's capacity to support Member States in achieving gender equality through the creation of a gender entity. This support underlined the importance member states place on the UN's ability to provide effective support for the goals we set in Beijing.

2010 is also a year to review and step up our efforts to promote women's role in peace and security, including building sustainable peace and to ensure that national and international activities in these areas take into account gender perspective. These aims are also at the root of Estonia's decision to develop a plan for the implementation of the SCR 1325.

Thank you, Mr Chair.
