



# **The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations**

**Statement by  
Dr. Gunnar Pálsson  
Permanent Representative of Iceland  
to the United Nations**

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**The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations**  
800 Third Ave. 36<sup>th</sup> fl. - Tel 212-593-2700. - Fax 212-593-6269  
[www.iceland.org/un/nyc](http://www.iceland.org/un/nyc)

Thirty years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, its implementation still leaves much to be desired. Women do not enjoy equal opportunities in all spheres of society and continue to be subject to persistent and grave violence in many parts of the world. What is needed, therefore, is not so much new commitments or lofty promises, as better delivery on ones already entered into.

The main theme of this session, “the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS” is certainly key. Addressing the Global HIV pandemic is essential to the achievement of the Millennium Goals of halting and reversing the spread of the disease.

In turn, promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment, as well as the protection of the girl child, are critical to our efforts at combatting HIV/AIDS. Women and adolescent girls are the most exposed to the pandemic and often go without access to preventive care and health services. Women bear a disproportionate share of the burden of caregiving worldwide. In the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the burden becomes even greater, as women shoulder the care of those infected and affected. That women and girls provide up to 90 per cent of the care-need generated by HIV/AIDS globally, bears sufficient testimony to the feminization of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men hampers women’s ability to participate fully in society at a political level and in the labour market. In order to diminish these inequalities and to empower women, measures need to be taken to enhance men’s role in caregiving.

In this context, allow me to mention the role of the Icelandic parental leave in improving equality between the genders. Parental leave gives mothers and fathers equal rights to paid leave. It has proven to be a powerful tool in sharing responsibilities between women and men, as up to 90 per cent of fathers use their right to paternity leave.

Recent studies indicate that paternity leave promotes better distribution of domestic responsibilities, as well as a more equal standing between men and women in the labour market.

To build on the progress achieved, the parliament passed a new gender equality legislation last year, including several provisions aimed at improving compliance. The law refers for the first time to gender-based violence and gender-based harassment is now a legal violation.

In addition, Iceland is taking concrete steps to combat trafficking in human beings through a national Action Plan. A separate Action Plan dealing with violence in close relationships and sexual violence against women is also in effect.

A so-called *Gender Equality Training Programme* developed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the University of Iceland was launched at the beginning of this year. In accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the programme, an experimental pilot project, focuses on professionals from developing and post-conflict societies. Iceland intends to seek recognition for the programme as a United Nations Training Programme upon the successful completion of the three year test period.

A new government, led by Iceland's first female Prime Minister and evenly balanced between men and women, is guided by the need to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. In an effort to address the gender dimension of the current financial crisis, the government has established a working group to evaluate the effect of the crisis on gender equality.

Mr. Chairman,

For our organization to reach its full potential as a champion of gender equality and women's empowerment there is a clear need to strengthen its capacity, accountability and effectiveness. In Iceland's view, the organization's gender architecture is best strengthened by establishing a new gender entity headed by an Under Secretary General.

Allow me to conclude by expressing our sincere hope that the membership will, through the ongoing informal consultations, arrive at a common understanding on the organization's gender architecture during the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly.