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PERMANENT MISSION OF ESTONIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS



**55th Session of the UN Commission on the
Status of Women
General Discussion - Statement by Estonia**

New York
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Mister Chair, distinguished members of delegations and the civil society,

Estonia aligns itself with the statement made previously on behalf of the European Union and would like to offer the following comments in our national capacity focusing on the main developments on gender equality in Estonia and at the international level.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women occupy a prominent place in our domestic and international agenda. The equality of women and men as enshrined in our Constitution has become an underlying principle of every legislation, policies and policy implementation. In line with the 2004 Gender Equality Act we have continued to work to mainstream gender in all our actions – from education to employment and to pursue gender equality through specific means, as, for example in innovative awareness raising campaigns for young people, job seekers and other specific groups. We are not there yet – and thus we need to address the most crucial aspect of gender discrimination: the mindset and awareness on gender equality of women and men, girls and boys. The Estonian Gender Equality Monitor, conducted in 2010 indicated that men and women have positive attitudes towards gender equality, but gender stereotypes persist in reality. That becomes obvious when looking at respondents understandings on educating boys and girls where traditional gender roles are highlighted. The outcome of the survey facilitates the fight against stereotyping as it shows explicitly where there is a need for more focused attention. Together with public awareness initiatives we have for example worked out special instructions for the ICT education, which recommends not separating classes based on gender.

2010 witnessed a number of concrete steps to advance gender equality. The development plan for the reduction of violence foresees a number of actions over the next years, including raising individuals' awareness of their rights, regular mapping of nature and scope of domestic violence; development of services of victims of domestic violence and training specialists working with both victims and abusers. The self-empowerment training for school-age girls conducted for the first time in 2010 is one and a positively received example of the plan's implementation.

Equal access to education, training, science and technology and employment is a foundation for equality, but undoubtedly also development in a contemporary society. Estonia has a very high rate of internet users and developed network on internet based services, public and private, and I am glad to note that the gender divide among our internet users is practically non-existent. Women use internet and ICT as much as men do. Estonia also has a relatively high proportion of women involved in the education sector. Though there are more women among university graduates in Estonia, this proportion is not reflected in the levels of pay. We have therefore commissioned a thorough study and are developing steps to reduce a gender pay gap in Estonia.

Mister Chair,

I would like to note the following significant developments over the last year, which we should build on. First, we believe that the establishment of a consolidated, strong gender entity, UN Women, presents us with an opportunity to enhance the UN work for gender equality, improve its inclusion in the UN activities on security, development and human rights and ensure accountability for these efforts. It was a goal that Estonia considered crucial to contribute to in 2010 and we will continue our efforts so that the many expectations related to UNW became a reality. Our continued contributions to UN Women as well as UNFPA and UNICEF are a part of these efforts. They reflect the focus on gender equality and the advancement of the situation of women in Estonia's development cooperation and human rights activities.

October 2010 also posed an opportunity to reaffirm our efforts to ensure the inclusion of the gender perspective, the participation and protection of women in peace and security processes in line with UNSCR 1325 and the subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security. Estonia strongly supported the adoption of resolution 1960(2010) on sexual violence in armed conflict, including the monitoring and accountability mechanisms it created. The issues on the agenda of this session – women's access to education and development are also inextricably linked to the success of any peace building and reconstruction process. Estonia's national action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 was adopted in 2010, enhancing and systematising our efforts to advance gender equality in conflict solution and post-conflict reconstruction. On this basis, Estonia will continue, for instance, its development cooperation to increase access to health and education in Helmand, Afghanistan.

Mister Chair,

Estonia has the honour to become, for the first time, a member of this distinguished commission next week, at the opening of its 56th session. It is for us a serious commitment to increase our efforts for the promotion of gender equality - both domestically and internationally.

Thank you.

Mister Chair