



Economic and Social Council

Commission on the Status of Women Fifty-Seventh Session

5 March 2013

General Discussion

H.E. Ms. Inga Mårte Thorkildsen
Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion

Chair,

In the course of the French Revolution the political activist and feminist Mme Olympe de Gouges had the courage to speak up for women's Human Rights.

She was executed.

Centuries later, women Human rights defenders are still facing systematic violence and even death in some parts of the world.

Through centuries of history, courageous women have moved the world forward, often against the opposition of men in power.

This year, Norway is celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of women's right to vote. It did not happen by itself. Freedom and enjoyment of Human Rights have always been taken, never given.

The day is yet to come when we will celebrate a universal break-through of women's right also to life, health and security. When that happens, it will be due to brave men and women and their fearless fight for justice.

And meeting at the CSW is part of it.

(Check against delivery)

Violence against women: what is it?

- A global disgrace, that persists regardless of national boundaries, regardless of ethnicity and regardless of wealth.

It is the leading cause of deaths and disabilities among women of all ages. Causing more deaths among young women than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined.

This disgrace is devastating the lives of millions of girls and women and of societies alike. Causing huge economic burdens on countries across the world.

Norway is no exception; a small country of 5 million people where the cost of such violence is estimated to one billion US Dollars annually.

No country can afford to overlook such facts.

Our message is clear:

- Violence against women can never be accepted, never excused, never tolerated.

I call upon us all to condemn the perpetrators of violence all those who abet it and those who allow impunity to continue. The culture of impunity is an effect of lack of resources and lack of interest rather than the lack of legislation.

Cabinets dominated by elite men and ministers allocate time and resources to issues of their choosing, and women's physical safety does not have a high enough priority. It is too often dealt with as a private issue, and not given the political priority it needs.

So when we speak about involving and engaging men, let us start with the top level. They are the ones who decide if there will be resources for investigation and prosecution. If there will be safe environments and surveillance, and if being born a girl child makes her truly equal before the law.

Chair,

Women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights is by some thought to be too controversial and difficult to talk about. But how can we **not** talk about it when an estimated 150 million girls under 18 suffered from sexual violence in 2012 alone? When teen pregnancies is the number one cause of mortality for girls between 15 and 19? When women and girls continue to undergo female genital mutilation and forced early marriages?

So much of the violence women and girls experience directly, affects their sexual and reproductive health and violates their rights.

Using arguments of religious freedom and cultural diversity to block decisions and avoid obligations, is unacceptable.

Violence against women and girls is not about culture – it is not about religion. It is about power, inequality and lack of political will and courage.

Chair, dear colleagues,

Violence against women is also violation of children's human rights. When a mother suffers from violence, her daughter suffers even more.

The first year of a child's life is the most dangerous period. Disease, neglect and abuse affect their brains and health throughout their entire lives. It affects the economy of all countries.

We cannot afford to overlook this knowledge and these facts. Let us come together to act on them, and end this common failure once and for all.

Thank you.