



PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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Advancement of Women

STATEMENT BY

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to the United Nations

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Mr Chair,

Women form half of the population of this globe. It is clear that political decisions and implementation of joint commitments require the support of both women and men. The realization of the human rights of women and equal participation are a prerequisite for achieving international peace and security, development, fulfillment of human rights and other important common goals.

It is essential to approach the challenges of democratic governance and equality with an understanding that women and men are equal but they have different needs. Democratic governance means that women and men from all social classes and ethnic backgrounds have the chance to participate in all political, social and economic decision making. We welcome the expanded political mobilization that has taken place during the so-called Arab Spring. Women of different political, religious and social backgrounds have come out to the streets and squares. Women have demanded the same things that men have: work, food, education, justice, dignity, participation in political decision-making, a better future for their children.

Key components of women's participation are fair and equitable conditions for education and work combined with the chance to lead a life of security and opportunity. All countries need to do better in this respect. It is well justified to use parity in education as a main measure for achieving MDG3, to promote gender equality and to empower women. Despite the progress made over the past decade school enrollment for girls remain much lower than for boys in many parts of the world, and is the lowest amongst the most vulnerable groups.

The World Economic Forum has identified Finland to be among the most competitive economies in the world. One of the factors affecting this is the gender equality that allows women and men to take effectively part in the economy. Women's economic empowerment is crucial for development. Women's full participation in economic life is essential in achieving internationally agreed goals and in improving the general quality of life in a global context. As the World Bank World Development Report 2012 Gender Equality and Development states, gender equality is smart economics: it can enhance economic efficiency and improve other development outcomes as well as make institutions more representative. In short: women's empowerment and equal participation means better life for everyone.

It is very regrettable that we still do not have enough progress on MDG5, to improve maternal health. Too many women die of causes that would be easy to prevent. This is a grave reminder of the status of women and girls in society. UNFPA and WHO argue that if we ensure access to modern contraceptives we can prevent between 20 and 40 % of all maternal deaths. Recognizing sexual and reproductive health and rights as human rights is a central element in promotion of gender equality. Finland promotes sexual and reproductive health and rights both in bilateral and multilateral fora and aims to strengthen the operating capability of the organizations working for them.

Women and women's perspectives also need to be represented at all high-level international debates: Studies show that women play an instrumental role in safeguarding scarce natural resources, thus women have a crucial role in promoting socially, economically and ecologically sustainable development. Women's potential must be fully utilized in the Rio+20 process, and their participation must be strengthened.

We also stress the importance of women's full and effective participation in conflict prevention, mediation, peace negotiations, peacekeeping and peacebuilding and reconstruction. One important tool is the implementation of our National Action Plan on women, peace and security. At the international level, Finland has twinning cooperation with Kenya and Afghanistan on SC resolution 1325 and has agreed on collaboration with the Government of Nepal to support the implementation of the Plan.

Women are key actors working for human rights. Violence against women is an alarming global problem, and a serious obstacle in achieving equality in the society. Violence against women occurs in all cultures and classes regardless of age, social standing, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or class. This happens in Finland, too. Women experience violence in intimate relationships, in the private and public spheres. All too often violence or its threat is also directed against women human rights defenders and those who work against violence against women; they deserve our special support and attention.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women stress that States have obligation to prevent and respond to acts of violence against women. Finland actively worked for a comprehensive regional arrangement, and was among the first countries to sign the Council of Europe's European Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic violence in May this year.

During the past year we have witnessed the creation of UN Women, the UN entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women. The vision of the UN Women's Executive Director, Michelle Bachelet and the UN Women's first strategic plan focus on important areas such ending violence against women, women, peace and security and women's economic empowerment. Finland welcomes this approach and fully supports UN Women's work.

Mr Chair,

Women's full participation in society, economy, and governance as well as providing women with equal opportunities that men have, is still not an everyday reality. Successfully attaining these goals entails hard work. Finland will continue to work in cooperation with all partners to make these human rights a reality for everyone, regardless of ethnicity, sex or age.

Thank you.