

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.

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