

Position paper for the Committee on the Commission of the Status of Women

The Republic of Iceland is honored to debate on the three topics chosen by this year's committee addressing: Women and Sustainability, Elimination of Gender-Based Violence, and Women in Education and Employment. Iceland believes it is vital to ensure gender equality. The Republic of Iceland is looking forward to reach a consensus with its fellow Member States on sustainable solutions concerning the crucial issues at hand.

I. Women and Sustainability

The Republic of Iceland strongly opposes gender inequality as it is an obstacle to sustainable development. Women hold a vital role in many aspects of sustainability such as environment, food security, menstrual waste and many more. Women face various challenges such as the access to natural resources and finances that are limited by gender discrimination. The Republic of Iceland believes that women's empowerment is a global issue that has to be urgently addressed. Indeed, the Republic of Iceland fully supports the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (agenda 21) working towards international agreements that respect the interests of all and protect the integrity of the global environmental and developmental system. One of their main demands towards the government concerning the maintain of sustainability globally was to ensure women's role in ecosystem management and control over environment degradation. (The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992) Also, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), which is supported by the Republic of Iceland, has made great progress towards empowering women and improving their status over the years (Halldor Asgrimsson, 2002). Iceland's National Committee for UNIFEM donated 1.4 million dollars to the UN Trust Fund. Projects to fight violence against women and children in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan were funded with the help of Iceland's contribution to the UN Trust Fund. (UN Women, 2008) The Icelandic government needs to continue on its work to ensure sustainability by securing women's access and control over land and productive resources. Ensuring their participation in decision-making processes concerning environmental policies and in politics is major to assuring sustainability. The CSW should establish partnerships with NGOs in developing areas such as countries where poverty is very present. The NGOs should innovate and optimize in systems that are already established in those countries so that the NGOs can maximize the scope of their services in those areas. Moreover, in order to achieve SDG6, the Republic of Iceland proposes to work on creating ecologic alternatives for products such as bio-degradable menstrual napkins that will help women who live in areas that don't necessarily have access to these products on a regular basis. Third, Iceland suggests empowering women by giving them a role in decision-making processes and offering them the opportunity to express their ideas since women's perspective is very important in poverty reduction, food security and environmental sustainability.

II. Elimination of Gender-Based Violence

The Republic of Iceland firmly believes that violence against women is an unacceptable reality that must be overcome as soon as possible. According to The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA), recent statistics show that 35% of women have suffered from physical and/or sexual intimate violence from a partner or a non-partner (UN Women, 2015). Violence against women negatively affects them on a sexual, mental, physical level and can more importantly affect their health. Many cases of violence such as marital assault, forced marriage, female infanticide and many more are very present, not only in developing countries, but also in developed countries. Gender equality is constitutionally guaranteed in Iceland. Furthermore, Iceland signed Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (The Istanbul Convention) in March 2011 and endorsed the Council of Europe's Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The Icelandic government recognizes that prostitution enhances gender-based violence. Therefore, the Parliament criminalized the purchase of sexual services in 2009 (amendment No. 54/2009 to the General Penal Code No. 19/1940) (UN Women, 2015). In 2010, Iceland's Parliament banned strip-clubs and criminalized the purchase of sexual services because it believes prostitution is a form of violence against women. Sweden and Norway also have the same opinion concerning the definition of prostitution. (Gender Equality in Iceland, January 2012). The Republic of Iceland adopted a national plan in accordance with CEDAW against Trafficking in Persons (2013-2016) in 2013. Even though that the Republic of Iceland has made significant progress on reducing gender-based violence, Iceland believes that more solutions to minimize harm perpetrated against women can be globally achieved. First, Iceland urges its government to ratify and incorporate the Istanbul Convention to its legislation to enhance women's protection from any form of violence. (CEDAW, 2016) Second, Iceland invites all Member States to develop global non-formal education curriculums in order to engage youth on gender based violence and for them to be alert on this issue. Third, prosecutions and bigger

sentences should be convicted to criminals perpetrating sexual offenses against women. There should also be further questioning on acquittals concerning sexual violence cases. (CEDAW, 2016) Finally, the Republic of Iceland moves to remind its fellow Member States that undertaking sustainable solutions in accordance with the SDG 5 is the key to eliminate gender based violence.

III. Women in Education and Employment

The Republic of Iceland strongly supports the empowerment of women through education and employment. Iceland acknowledges and condemns gender gap in education and employment and believes that women should not be underestimated nor given fewer opportunities than men. According to UNESCO, 31 million girls are still out of school around the world. Two thirds of the 774 million illiterate people in the world are women and it has been the case for the past twenty years with no improvement. (UNESCO, 2014) On a global scale, women are paid less than men as they earn on average 60 to 75 per cent of men's salaries. (UN Women, 2015) The Republic of Iceland prides itself as the first European State to elect a woman as its Head of State. Furthermore, the Republic of Iceland is proud top the first place with the narrowest gender gap in the world and has been for the past five years. An Action Plan including 43 projects was adopted by Iceland's Parliament under the Gender Equality Act (No 10/2008) in 2011 that was divided in several chapters regarding the Labor market, The Administration, the Gender Pay gap, Education and Gender Equality. (UN Women, 2014) The Republic of Iceland adopted in 2012 the Equal Pay Standard and a Plan of Action on Gender Equality regarding Wages. Iceland acknowledges that considerable progress towards ensuring gender equality has been made. However, we recognize the need to continue working on solutions that reduce gender pay gap. Till this day, women are still payed 14 to 18 percent less than men in Iceland. The Republic of Iceland invites all Member States to undertake sustainable solutions in accordance with SDG5 on combatting gender inequality in education and employment. First, the government of Iceland wants to use more adequately poorly invested money in the education sector and improve teachers' training for them to be able to wisely teach while providing gender-responsive quality education could decrease the level of gender inequality in education. Iceland moves to raise awareness against gender inequality by addressing gender stereotypes and discrimination in school programs. Moreover, Iceland moves to implement employment workshops in schools in order to breakdown gender-based stereotypes by rising awareness on gender-sensitive professions .Such a plan would help our youth acknowledge the fact that anyone, boy or girl, should have equal chances of gaining access to a work field. Third, using publicity on social media in a positive and innovative way to inform the youth about the issues on the gender gap will be a method of permanently eliminating gender inequality because further generations will learn to be feminists.

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