

Commission on the Status of Women
Forty-ninth session

Stichting ~~Minister~~ **by H.E. Ms. Sinikka**
Minister of Social Affairs and Health

Head of Delegation

Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finland fully associates herself with the statement made by Luxembourg on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make a few additional remarks on issues that are of particular interest to Finland.

Madame Chairperson,

Finland has a long history of women's political participation. Almost a hundred years ago, in 1906, Finland was the first country in the world to give women full political rights. Today we have a female President, and women's proportion of the members of parliament is 38 per cent.

To a large extent, Finnish women and men agree that the responsibilities for providing financial security for the family, everyday running of the home, and parenting should be shared. This attitude reflects the prevalence and popularity of the two-supporter family model in Finland.

Yet, some challenges remain. Female employees' pay is adversely affected by their gender.

Women's wages are still on average 80 per cent of men's salaries in Finland, partly due to the fact that men and women are employed in different sectors which, traditionally, are valued differently.

Women still use most of the statutory parental leaves. Parental leaves are still viewed as women's rather than men's right. It is clear that the role and attitudes of men and boys are essential in achieving gender equality, which in turn brings benefits for men and boys as well as for women and girls.

In Finland, in order to promote further the equality between the sexes the Government has instituted an Action Plan for Gender Equality for the years 2004-2007. It includes programmes and other measures promoting gender equality, which different ministries will be carrying out during this parliamentary period. All ministries participated in the drafting of the plan and are currently implementing it. One of the core elements in the action plan is gender mainstreaming in state administration. We are also currently renewing our law on gender equality.

Many of the challenges for the future both nationally and globally remain the same as they were already in Beijing. Nationally, for Finland, they include equal pay, elimination of segregation at work, and elimination of violence against women.

Madame Chairperson,

The question of globalization emerged already in Beijing, but today it has become a key issue on the global agenda. According to the ILO World Commission Report "A Fair Globalization - Creating Opportunities for All", globalization has resulted in serious imbalances in some countries. The extent of this imbalance depends on the level of gender equality prevailing in the norms, institutions and policies of a country. In many countries deep-rooted gender inequalities have meant that the social cost of globalization has fallen disproportionately on women.

At the same time, for many women, globalization has led to an improvement in their economic and social status. The gainful employment made possible by globalization has given these women workers higher incomes than in their previous situations.

Our future challenge is still to tackle the structural inequalities in our societies. This can be done by systematically mainstreaming a gender perspective in all our policies and programmes, both nationally and internationally. National governments carry the main responsibility in this regard, but the international community as a whole should be fully engaged in supporting this development.

Madame Chairperson,

During the coming two weeks, we have the opportunity to recommit ourselves to the goals and objectives set in Beijing. This is also crucial in view of the review of the Millennium Declaration next September, since the MDGs cannot be achieved without the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the CEDAW Convention.

As Secretary-General Kofi Annan put it: There is no time to lose if we are to reach the goals by 2015 - only by investing in the world's women can we expect to get there.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.