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PANEL V

**Future perspectives on the promotion of Gender Equality: through the eyes of
young women and men**

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* The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

Written statement/Frida Ohlsson

Future perspectives on the promotion of Gender Equality: through the eyes of young women and men

Mr/Madame Chairperson

It is a great honour for me to be here today and to have the opportunity to participate in this panel discussion. I am here representing the Young Folk's Association, through the National Council of Swedish Youth Organizations. Young Folk's Association has 9000 members of whom 80 % are between the ages of 7 and 25. The most important activities take place in the local clubs. Every club is unique and each club decide about their own activities.

Gender equality is imperative for sustainable development and a foundation in a true democracy. An organisation or a country that only includes parts of the population or members is not a democracy. We need to work with gender equality issues to ensure that democracy involves everyone. The capacity, knowledge and experiences of both women and men are a prerequisite for a sustainable development. Youth organizations that work with gender equality contribute to an inter-generational culture of equality and a more democratic society. Democracy is not won once and for all, but must be won and nourished by each generation.

I would like to share with you a process that has led to making democracy and the promotion of gender equality a concrete reality in my organization.

Sweden has a long history of co-educational schooling and other activities, rather than separate arrangements for girls and boys, women and men respectively. This, in a way, has been seen as one of the symbols, expressions and indicators for equality between the sexes. Now, when we are looking more closely at structures and systems, we can see that in fact the opportunities for influencing decision-making and organizational politics are far from gender equal. In some organizations, work to support girls and young women and to promote gender equality has used same-sex methods – that is girls only or boys only solutions – to give girls and boys the opportunity to develop as individuals instead of having to compete or mingle with the opposite sex.

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Future perspectives on the promotion of Gender Equality: through the eyes of young women and men

For many years now, Sweden has been seen as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world. Through my work I meet young people who know no other social reality than in Sweden, we are all equal to one another regardless of sex. However, the truth is that in many areas, we still have a lot to do: boys and young men speak out more and get more attention in schools, young men are paid better than young women and all young people experience a more sexualised media, although the way in which young women are usually depicted – undressed, passive and as objects, tends to be very different than how young men are usually portrayed – fully clothed, active and as subjects. All of these examples reinforce stereotypes of female and male behaviour that are not much different from those that applied in our parents' and grandparents' generations. The capabilities, feelings, experiences and ideas of young people must be taken seriously, by themselves as well as by others. Very often I meet young girls and boys who express personal feelings of uncertainty due to some experience that has reminded them of the way gender inequalities work; they feel that they do not have the same opportunities or that their world is limited because of their sex. One of the main tasks we have is the provision of analytical tools that can help young people to explain the unequal world they live and must make their futures in.

One of the tools my organization has developed involves gathering statistics as a basis for self-critical discussions, self-discovery and collective reflection concerning our own organization. Feelings can always be discussed and are difficult to explain, but statistics based on the workings of your organization can render certain circumstances and dynamics visible and are hard to ignore. Young People's Association has developed a tool for measuring participation in our annual meetings. We analyse how much time each delegate used in addressing the plenary meeting, the attendance of the delegates disaggregated according to sex, the behaviour of the delegates towards each other and the participation of females and males in discussions.

When we used this method for the first time, in the year 2001, the results of how much time different people used in the plenary meeting came as a shock to many of us. Boys used 73 % of the time and the girls only 27 %. Two years later the boys talked 60 % and the girls 40 % of the time. At both events the girls were in majority among the delegates; 56 % and 58 % respectively. We could also see that the boys proposed more resolutions than the girls, and that the resolutions proposed by boys were more often adopted than those proposed by girls. Our simple analytical method clearly showed that boys take more of the space and they

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therefore have a much greater opportunity to influence decision-making. These results have been a basis for our internal work with gender equality at national and regional levels. My experience is that it is much easier to start a discussion with these statistics as a common base. The statistics reveal a very un-equal participation between girls and boys in the organization's decision-making, challenging many members belief that our organization provides girls and boys and the same opportunities.

Our organization has developed this method and it has helped us, but we have realized that its use must be ongoing. We can see a difference in the participation and influence of girls and boys from years 2001 to 2003, but we are still far from our goal of being a genuinely gender-equal organisation. This year, we will once again measure the gender dynamics of our annual meeting. Gender equality is not something that can be done as a project for a limited period of time. The work has to be mainstreamed and our work must include and incorporate new members and their views, opinions and situations.

I encourage you all to go home and do this simple test: measure and analyze the time that people of both sexes talk in meetings. The difference in the amount of time that girls and boys respectively speak and are listened to is not unique, not for young people, nor for Sweden.

I believe that young people today and in the future will continue to be interested in working with gender equality issues. I think that those who work with young people must help them to discover critical analytical tools to enable them to understand the workings of the world around them in gendered terms, everything from a lesson in school to participation in political decision-making bodies. We, who work with gender equality, must realise that we have a responsibility to help future generations and their work to promote gender equality and true democracy... and we must start today.

Thank you.