



ADDRESS BY THE LAW COMMISSIONER
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS, LEDA KOURSOMBA,
AS HEAD OF THE CYPRUS DELEGATION
AT THE CONSIDERATION BY THE COMMITTEE
ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST WOMEN
OF THE COMBINED THIRD, FOURTH AND FIFTH
PERIODIC REPORTS OF CYPRUS
SUBMITTED UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION
ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS
OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
NEW YORK

25 MAY 2006

Madam Chairwoman,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

It is, indeed, an honour and a privilege for me and the other members of the delegation of the Republic of Cyprus to appear before your Committee in order to present and elaborate on the 3rd, 4th and 5th Periodic Report of Cyprus, submitted under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

May I be allowed to present the members of our delegation:

- Myself, the Law Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus, an independent officer, directly responsible to the President of the Republic, with a mandate of six years, having competence, inter alia, to make proposals for reform of the national law so as to achieve compatibility with international human rights instruments, like the CEDAW, and to prepare the country reports under such international treaties. The Law Commissioner is, traditionally, appointed by the Council of Ministers as the President of the National Institution for the Protection of Human Rights.
- The Permanent Representative of the Republic to the United Nations in New York, H.E. Ambassador Andreas Mavroyiannis.
- Ms Maro Varnavidou, Senior Officer in the Ministry of Justice and Public Order; Secretary General of the National Machinery for Women's Rights; and Vice-Chairwoman of the Advisory Committee on Violence in the Family.
- Ms Penelope Erotokritou, Secretary A', at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Cyprus to the United Nations in New York.

- Ms Angela Droussioutou, Planning Officer A' in the Planning Bureau, responsible officer for women's rights; Secretary of the Cyprus Society of Family Therapy.
- Ms Kyriaki Lambrianidou, Inspector Criminologist; Head of the Human Rights Office of the Cyprus Police
- Ms Natassa Economou, Administrative Officer at the Ministry of the Interior, responsible officer for women's rights; Secretary of the Interministerial Committee on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.
- Ms Katerina Aristodemou, Labour Officer, Department of Labour in the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance; responsible for developments in the labour market and employment policies.

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Madam Chairwoman,

Cyprus attaches great significance to the CEDAW, as the principal human rights instrument affecting the status of women in society and takes seriously into consideration the recommendations made by your Committee in the framework of Government policy in relation to gender equality. We strongly believe that this process of review is a critical element in our efforts towards achieving our common goal, and in this regard we look forward to engaging with you in the constructive dialogue, which will follow.

Cyprus has been a party to CEDAW, since 1985, and has submitted its Initial and Second Reports in 1994, which were examined in January 1996.

Ten years later, in the context of the combined 3rd, 4th and 5th Periodic Reports, submitted in 2004 (CEDAW/C/CYP/3-5, 6 August 2002), we are here to present to you the major progress achieved in the field of gender equality during

the period under review, together with the problems and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the CEDAW, as well as our future plans and initiatives towards achieving de jure and de facto equality.

I would like at the outset to apologize for the fact that the submission of the Periodic Report of Cyprus was delayed to the extent that Cyprus has submitted combined third, fourth and fifth Periodic Reports. Though we appreciate that this is not an excuse, we feel obliged to state before you that, it was due to the fact that during that period, the limited resources of Cyprus were devoted to other UN processes assessing progress in gender equality (such as Beijing +5 and Beijing +10). In parallel, enormous work was being done for paving the way for the accession of Cyprus to the European Union, which, as we stated in the Report, involved the harmonization of our laws with the EU law, and at the same time, the creation of the administrative infrastructure, which again served gender equality.

Before I proceed to the brief overview of the progress achieved in the field of women's issues in Cyprus, I take this opportunity to express to you, on behalf of the Government of Cyprus, our deep appreciation for your substantial contribution towards the achievement of gender equality within the UN system as well as the UN Member-States.

Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee,

Since the examination of the Previous Report of Cyprus, three major factors played a catalytic role on the further advancement of the implementation of the CEDAW in Cyprus. Firstly, the Beijing Platform for Action has given a new impetus, strengthened the political will and intensified the efforts towards legal and de facto gender equality. Secondly, the accession process of Cyprus to the EU, since 1998 moving at a very intensive pace, necessitated the harmonization with the *acquis communautaire*; this resulted in the enactment, within specified time

limits, of very important legislation affecting women's lives in the area of equal treatment and conditions at work, and, in parallel, to the creation of the necessary administrative infrastructure for the implementation of the relevant legislation and policies. Thirdly, the UN Secretary General's latest initiatives for a peaceful settlement of the Cyprus problem, along with the Government's efforts towards the reunification of the island, have boosted up women's initiatives for bicomunal meetings and projects contributing to the creation of a culture for peace on the island.

The profile of economy Cyprus enjoys, has increased the standard of living for both men and women in Cyprus. This economic progress could not have been achieved without the contribution and active participation of half of its population, the women of Cyprus.

The accession of Cyprus to the European Union, on May 1st, 2004, certainly, further enhanced progress in that direction. A crucial element in further promoting women's advancement in this new environment is the dynamic interaction of all "players" in the game, namely the Government, the Parliament and civil society.

The Government's commitment and strong political will towards gender equality has been primarily manifested by acceding to and ratifying, during the period under examination a series of international legal Instruments on women's rights, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (ratified by Law 1(III)/2002).

A full list of international human rights instruments, as well as a list of those related to women's rights, to which Cyprus is a party, have been submitted to the Committee.

Madam Chairwoman,

Major priorities and Commitments

Based on the provisions of the CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and EU laws and policies, the Government of Cyprus, through the National Machinery for Women's Rights has formulated a National Action Plan covering areas corresponding to the national priorities and its declared commitments at the Beijing Conference. In parallel, the gender perspective and gender equality specific goals, actions and measures have integrated to a great extent in other more specific on-going processes of recent years, such as the Strategic Development Plans, the National Action Plan on Employment, the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion, and the Plan of Action on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

While there's much to be done in order to achieve the level of equality we all desire, we assess that there were significant positive developments in all major priorities and commitments of the Government.

More specifically, progress has been achieved, mainly, in the following areas:

- Legal reform, aiming at the elimination of discrimination and the further safeguarding of women's rights in all fields of law, and, in particular, in the Family Law, Labour Law, and Criminal Law, has continued intensively. It is not my intention to reiterate all reforms that have taken place in the legal framework. Those reforms are presented in detail in the Periodic Report and the Responses to the List of Issues and Questions for Consideration of the aforesaid report. Nevertheless I would like to single out for special mention the reform on Citizenship Law and underline that the elimination of the legislative discrimination on the grounds of gender relating to the acquisition

of citizenship allowed the withdrawal, on 28 June 2000, of Cyprus' single reservation on Article 9, paragraph 2 of the CEDAW (Law 141(I)/2002).

Of particular importance is also the enactment of Law 104(I)/2003 which allows, for the first time, civil marriages between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, thus breaking legal and societal barriers of centuries.

- Public awareness on women's rights and gender issues as well as the education of the public and, in particular, of women on the relevant laws, has also been an area of top priority during the period under consideration. The National Machinery for Women's Rights, women's organizations, the social partners, research and academic institutions, as well as the competent Ministries and Departments have done considerable work in this field. Seminars, campaigns, publications, leaflets, training programmes and websites, are contributing towards making laws and policies broadly known to the public. The Mass Media play an important role in promoting gender issues due mainly to the "mushrooming effect" of new private radio and TV stations, which opened up a number of new platforms for women.

(Samples of information and education material, produced in this respect, which will be made available to you today)

- Economic empowerment of women has been another priority area, pursued through (i) the enactment and implementation of a comprehensive legal framework safeguarding equal pay of work of equal value, equal treatment in employment and training, equality in social insurance, protection of maternity and parental leave, (ii) the expansion of care facilities, (iii) the creation of monitoring institutional mechanisms, (iv) vocational guidance and training, and, (v) schemes to support women's entrepreneurship.

As a result of these efforts and measures, the employment rate of women has increased reaching the level of 58,4% in 2005, the pay gap has

been closing down (from 33% in 1994 to 25% in 2004), while the unemployment rate of women remains low, at the level of 6,5% in 2005, whereas the EU average is around 10%.

An area of pride is the increase of women's entrepreneurship in Cyprus. Due to the joined efforts of the National Machinery for Women's Rights, which run and concluded successfully an EU Programme on "women in the Business World-Enhancement of Female Entrepreneurship", the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, which introduced in 2002 a Special Scheme to Enhance Female Entrepreneurial Activity providing grants to women to set up their own business, the Women's Cooperative Bank, set up in 2001 to support in particular women's economic initiatives, and the very active contribution of the Federation of Business and Professional Women (FBPW), the rate of female business ownership increased from 12% in 2001 to 21% in 2005.

- The prevention and combating of all forms of violence against Women has been another top priority area. Cyprus, being one of the first countries in the world to have introduced in 1994 a special law on violence in the family, has continued its efforts with the enactment of revised legislation in 2000 in order to effect substantial improvements based on the experience gained with the implementation of the initial legislation.

At the same time, important work has been done in the field of raising public awareness and sensitization on the issue of domestic violence, the training of professionals involved in the handling of violence cases, particularly police officers, and the promotion of interdepartmental collaboration. The contribution of NGO's, particularly in providing protection and assistance to victims, has proved extremely valuable.

- In relation to the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women, the enactment of the appropriate legal framework in line with EU standards, which is now under review for further improvement, the adoption of a comprehensive Action Plan on Trafficking of Human Beings, the setting up of a multisectoral committee under the Ministry of Interior to monitor the implementation of the Plan and the relevant legislation, the setting up of a coordinating unit for trafficking at the Police Headquarters demonstrate the political will and extent of the Government's efforts towards this direction.
- Balanced participation of women and men in Political and Public Life has been another priority area, pursued, mainly, through training programmes, aimed at encouraging and supporting women to enter politics, the launching of public campaigns to support women candidates, the political appointments of women to high ranking positions.

In last Sunday's Parliamentary elections women candidates constituted 23,2% of the total, (113 out of 487) and 8 were elected out of 56, representing 14.3%. For the first time ever there was a Turkish Cypriot woman among the candidates, the state having succeeded to overcome the relevant constitutional obstacles.

The first woman Judge of the Supreme Court was appointed in 2004.

- The National Machinery for Women's Rights plays a key role in the coordination, monitoring and implementation of the Government's policy in the field of gender equality and the promotion of gender mainstreaming throughout the public sector. During the period under review it has been strengthened with human and financial recourses. Its budget in 1995 was \$57.000 whereas in 2006 was \$1,2 mln.

This has increased the possibilities of funding NGOs in promoting their own programmes and activities as well as the possibilities of the General Secretariat to use the services and expertise of the private sector in areas such as research, (Universities, Research Institutes), publications, organization of events, and the implementation of EU programmes.

One of the major achievements of the National Machinery has been the unification of the Women's Movement in Cyprus and the empowerment of NGOs working in the field of gender equality.

The National Machinery encompasses a large number of women's organizations with which it maintains a continuous and productive collaboration. Two Turkish-Cypriot organizations have, since 2004, become members of the Council of the National Machinery.

- During the period under review, new human rights mechanisms and equality bodies have been put in place promoting gender equality according to their specific sphere of competence. These include the National Institution for the Protection of Human Rights, operating within the guidelines of the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR). The expansion of the competences of the Ombudswoman, so as to create an independent extra-judicial mechanism to investigate complaints of gender discrimination has been the most significant development in this area. In addition, a growing number of new specialized NGOs has been set up.
- Education and Health. Progress has also been achieved in the area of education, where women are highly educated, while in the field of health, the infrastructure and services of the public and private sector addressed to women's needs have been considerably improved.

- Rural Women: Progress regarding the status of rural women has also been achieved. Besides the elimination of legal discrimination against self-employed rural women and their full social security coverage granted in 2001, rural women enjoy, on an equal basis to urban women, access to the public health and education services. Efforts have also been made for the economic empowerment of rural women with emphasis on their entrepreneurship, through the government schemes supporting female entrepreneurship, agrotourism and alternative farming.

Madam Chairwoman and Members of Committee,

Future priorities/ Actions

We consider that, during the period under review, there have been significant positive developments in all areas covered by the CEDAW and undoubtedly the position of women in the Cypriot society has improved in all its manifestations since the Previous Report. Nevertheless, we are fully aware that much remains to be done until we achieve full de facto gender equality in all walks of life.

We intend and plan to continue our efforts and work intensively and effectively towards the following goals:

- changing social attitudes among women and men regarding gender-equality issues, which are still identified as the major obstacles for the advancement of women. Men and boys should be taken on board of these efforts, which will include measures throughout and at all levels of the education system, as well as the Media.
- better implementation of the legislation through awareness raising programmes, specialized training, as well as the strengthening of all institutional mechanisms monitoring implementation.

- promoting further positive action measures as well as gender mainstreaming in all Government policies including gender budgeting.
- closing further the pay-gap, increasing the employment rate of women, promoting women's participation at the decision-making level of economic life, as well as expanding and improving care facilities and the all day school and other measures for the reconciliation of professional and family life with emphasis on the involvement of both sexes.
- supporting and meeting more sufficiently the special needs of disadvantaged groups of women including migrant and foreign women the number of which has been constantly increasing in the last years.
- promoting a balanced participation of women and men at the decision making level of public and political life through specialized training and encouragement of women, campaigns, etc. as well as measures for development of political ambition and active citizenship among boys and girls through the school system.
- preventing and combating all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence and trafficking of human beings, with special emphasis on the multisectoral approach and collaboration, the specialized training of professionals, the effective enforcement of legislation and measures for the protection of victims.
 - In addition, in the area of domestic violence the attention will be focused on the adoption of a National Action Plan on Domestic Violence, which is under preparation, the introduction of a pilot project for therapeutic treatment of abusers and the systematic collection and evaluation of relevant data through a central data bank.

- While, in the area of trafficking the establishment of a Government shelter for victims of sexual violence and the provision of the appropriate support and protection will be amongst our immediate priorities.
- promoting the systematic integration of gender equality in the educational system, with particular emphasis on the training of teaching staff, and the further development of sex education. In addition, the University of Cyprus plans to introduce gender studies.

How do we intend to proceed in reaching these goals in practice?

Madam Chairwoman,

At the initiative of the Chairman of the National Machinery for Women's Rights, the Minister of Justice and Public Order, a comprehensive new National Action Plan on Gender Mainstreaming is under preparation, covering the major areas of our concern. All government departments, NGOs, Local Authorities, as well as academic institutions, human rights bodies, etc, have been involved in the preparation of this National Action Plan. In its preliminary form the Plan covers the following major policy areas/mechanisms:

- Economy and Employment,
- Education and Training, Science and Research,
- Participation at the decision making level,
- Violence against women and trafficking,
- Social Rights,
- Social stereotypes and attitudes, and Media
- Mechanisms for promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Plan.

The National Machinery will have a central role in monitoring and coordinating the implementation of the Plan.

We believe that this National Action Plan on Gender Mainstreaming will contribute towards the systematic and coherent approach of gender issues, complementing all existing National Action Plans on specific areas of policies.

For the implementation of measures and projects in the field of gender equality Cyprus will continue to seek and secure EU co-funding.

Madam Chairwoman,

Distinguished members of the Committee

I will like to reassure you of my Government's strong commitment to continue working towards the achievement to the maximum of the goals of the Convention.

We look upon your Committee as an experienced body whose recommendations should and will be taken seriously into consideration, in order to achieve the required effectiveness in reaching the common goal. In this regard we look forward to engaging with you in what we know will be a constructive dialogue.

Thank you Madam Chairwoman, Members of the Committee.