



PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS
866 UN PLAZA, SUITE 222, NEW YORK, NY 10017 - TEL. 1-212-355-2100 - FAX 1-212-759-6156

STATEMENT BY

Mr. Stefan Wallin

**Minister of Culture and Sport and
Minister at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health**

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HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION AND THE OUTCOME DOCUMENTS OF THE TWENTYTHIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY: SHARING OF EXPERIENCES AND GOOD PRACTICES ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLATFORM FOR ACTION, WITH A VIEW TO OVERCOMING REMAINING OBSTACLES AND NEW CHALLENGES

Mr Chair/Madame Chairperson

Finland aligns herself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

Equal access of women and girls to education is an important human right, and also a key to effectively implement the Beijing Platform for Action. Finland believes that this session gives us a possibility to share good practices which can help us to take further steps in order to strengthen the rights of women and girls globally. Finland also actively supports the work of UN Women under the leadership of Michelle Bachelet.

Women's rights are one of the priorities of our international human rights policy. From global perspective it is important that women can equally participate in decision-making processes at all levels of society. Finland is convinced that education is an essential instrument that gives women and girls new opportunities in this respect.

A woman or a girl can only be an active participant in the society, if she has the knowledge to make decisions concerning her own body, sexuality, and reproductive health. This increases possibilities of women and girls to receive education and get access to decent work outside their homes. Therefore Finland consistently supports the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights internationally through development cooperation.

Mr Chair/Madame Chairperson

Gender-based segregation in education is a concern also in Finland. It stems from the choices girls and boys make when entering vocational and higher-level studies.

The issue has been studied by a Government appointed Committee assigned to make proposals concerning education and training, with a view to alleviating gender-based segregation.

One of the Committee's main recommendations is that all pupils and students must be provided with equal opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills required in society and working life.

Girls and boys must be supported through teaching, guidance and counselling so as to allow them to make subject, educational and career choices based on their individual qualities, strengths and motivations – not on their gender.

Another recommendation is that we need to look at the teaching materials, the school books. Gender stereotypes are very alive in them. Now there is guidance material for the publishers to make them aware of this and to avoid it.

In Finland also non-formal education has a relatively strong tradition, and is considered to be a vital additional path towards personal development and lifelong learning.

Non-formal education takes place in a wide spectrum of civil society organisations; one of particular significance being sports clubs and associations. Sport offers a dynamic way to engage citizenry outside of the conventional educational structures. It can work to bridge the gender gap that persists with respect to positions of leadership and decision-making.

Mr Chair/Madame Chairperson

Finland strongly believes that any education investment in girls and women will have a multiplier effect across all international development goals. Education is a basic human right, and not only that: It is a decisive catalyst for all human development. It is a powerful driver of economic and sustainable development, for more peaceful and equitable societies. It reduces child and maternal mortality, increases entrepreneurship and job opportunities. Not to mention that education has positive implications in reducing violence against girls and women.

With only four years to go until 2015, target date for the Millennium Development Goals, we all need to look into ways of transforming our educational systems so that they better meet the demands of the 21st century. We are not yet quite on track, but Finland is fully committed to the outcome document adopted by the MDG Summit in September 2010.

I thank you Chair.