



**The Permanent Mission of Iceland
to the United Nations**

**Statement by
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Permanent Representative**

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The theme of this year's session of the CSW is fundamental to the quest for gender equality. Fortunately, educational opportunities have improved, generally speaking, in the last decades. The enrollment of girls and women in schools and educational programs has steadily increased, although worrying gaps remain, especially as regards access to post primary education. Ensuring a gender-sensitive policy and increased participation of women in all areas of education, training, science and technology, will advance women's rights, contribute to a better and a more just society, as well as accelerating economic growth and social development.

In recent times, my country has made substantial progress on gender equality. Iceland's government is led by a woman and women represent around 40% of cabinet ministers, parliamentarians and local government representatives. As a result of these and other positive changes, Iceland has topped the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index for the last two years.

Progress in areas of politics, education and health notwithstanding, Icelandic women still lag behind men in economic terms. In view of this year's theme, it is a pertinent question why a higher level of education does not translate into higher wages for women. Two thirds of Icelandic University graduates are women; yet the gender pay gap, measured in 2008 at 16%, persists and women hold fewer leadership positions than men. Bridging the gender pay gap through better implementation is now seen as a priority.

To correct this imbalance, the Icelandic government has adopted legislation to facilitate women's advancement in the economic arena. A gender quota of 40% has been set for board members in companies with 50 employees or more, providing companies three years to reach this objective. Furthermore, companies with 25 employees or more are expected to include gender-based statistics in their annual reports.

Iceland's government is determined to fight domestic and sexual violence, consistent with its action plan of 2006. A revised plan for the period 2011-2015 will put special emphasis on examining gender-based acts of violence, their prosecution and handling in the judicial system. The aim is to ensure that a bigger proportion of cases of this nature reaches the courts. As an example of the public interest in the campaign against violence and the sexual abuse of women, a group of 22 NGOs organized an international conference on the theme last year on the 35th anniversary of Women's Day, the first major political rally of women in Iceland. The main speaker was Ms. Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. The following day about 50,000 Icelandic women, approximately a third of the total female population of the country, took to the streets to show their support.

Iceland has criminalized the purchase of sexual services and has thereby joined Sweden and Norway in defining prostitution as a form of violence against women that must be eliminated. Iceland has furthermore criminalized the debasement of

women through so-called strip-dancing, acknowledging findings that have shown a clear connection between sex clubs and trafficking in women for sexual slavery, as well as links with international crime.

In addition, the government has taken measures to ensure that the effects of the financial crisis do not result in undermining past achievements in the field of gender equality. In this way, gender perspectives must thus be taken into account in all policy- and decision-making.

Iceland has put gender equality at the forefront of its foreign policy. Special focus has been given to women's empowerment, particularly as regards peace processes, development co-operation and climate change.

Iceland, a long-time proponent of improved gender coordination within the UN system, will remain a committed supporter of UN Women. We are encouraged by the vigorous leadership shown by Executive Director Bachelet and look forward to seeing concrete results of UN Women's work for women everywhere.

Last year marked the tenth anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Iceland is strongly committed to advancing the aims of the resolution, as equal participation of both sexes is key to the achievement of sustainable peace. Despite some progress in the last decade, the knowledge and experience of women is still often ignored and women remain largely excluded from peace processes. I take this opportunity to urge other countries to adopt National Action Plans to ensure the implementation of the resolution. Iceland's reviewed Action Plan, to be published later in the year, will contain specific goals, clear indicators and a transparent monitoring mechanism.

In the context of another ongoing international process, Iceland has emphasized the gender perspective in negotiations on climate change. We welcome in particular the focus on gender equality and effective participation of women in the outcome of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancún and look forward to building on this foundation in the negotiations to be concluded in South Africa at the end of the year.

In sum, although different countries will have different starting points, our final point of destination should everywhere be the same; to improve women's access and participation in all fields of political, economic and social life. Here, equal opportunities for education and employment is certainly indispensable. Rest assured that Iceland will continue to cooperate actively with other countries as we address that common challenge.