



Finland to the UN Security Council in 2013–2014

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Advancement of Women

Statement by

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to the United Nations

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(check against delivery)

*Distinguished Chair,*

Finland aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union.

Ensuring women's full and effective participation and involvement in society is one of the bedrocks in Finland's human rights policy. Finland has long been an active advocate for gender equality both nationally and internationally.

Despite the progress made in the field of gender equality, violence against women remains a serious challenge. It occurs everywhere, regardless of age, social standing, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Violence is also particularly true for those women, who often face multiple forms of discrimination, such as indigenous women, women with disabilities, and women belonging to sexual minorities. It is especially important to find concrete ways to best promote their human rights and to empower them. Moreover, all too often the threat or use of violence is directed against women human rights defenders and those who work against violence against women; also they deserve our special support and attention.

Over the last years, Finland has systematically worked towards ending violence against women. At the national level, the Finnish Government has adopted a five-year Action Plan on Violence against Women. Its aim is to tackle violence proactively by seeking to influence attitudes and behavior related to gender-based violence. In May 2011, Finland signed, among the first countries, the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. We have committed ourselves to ratifying the Convention by the end of 2013. With this in view, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, together with the Council of Europe, will organize a sub-regional seminar in Helsinki in January 2013, aimed at promoting the ratification of the Convention.

Combating violence against women is also one of the priorities of UN Women. Finland strongly supports the organization in this area and in promoting gender equality in general. We demonstrate this commitment by increasing our core funding to UN Women from this year's 5 million to 7.5 million US dollars in 2013.

*Mr. Chair,*

Women's often limited or even non-existent access to justice is another area where increased efforts are needed. All too often the justice system, including the police and the courts, deny women justice. Women's access

to resources and influence in politics, public services and the economic sector need to be secured in order to achieve true gender equality. Therefore, we welcome the first ever High Level meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law which was held on 24 September. We are pleased that the outcome document reaffirmed the equal rights of men and women and that the right to equal access to justice for all, including vulnerable groups, was recognized. Special attention was paid to gender-based discrimination and to violence against women, as well as to the need to empower women to fully enjoy their rights and participate in institutions of governance, justice and security. It was encouraging that a number of Member States responded to the Secretary-General's call and made voluntary pledges based on their national priorities and needs. Finland gave several pledges related to women's access to justice and especially, to tackling violence against women.

We also had the honor to host together with South Africa and the UN Women a High-Level Event on Women's Access to Justice. We thank all participants of this event. The very high level of attendance and the numerous pledges made demonstrated that there is broad support and commitment to combat gender-based discrimination and empower women and girls through strengthening the rule of law. Moreover, together with a number of other committed countries Finland was honored to take part in the launching of the United States' initiative on Equal Futures Partnership. We encourage others to join in this work with us.

*Mr. Chair,*

Another issue related to women's empowerment and the protection and promotion of human rights is sexual and reproductive health. For the fulfillment of these rights, women's and girls' access to good-quality and comprehensive reproductive health information, education and care are crucial. In this context, it is especially important to pay attention to young women. The number of young people in the world today is growing constantly. Persons who are 25 years or younger constitute almost half of the world's population. Ensuring that the young people of today are able to make informed and responsible decisions such as whether and when to have children is not only important in terms of their own health, well-being and human rights, but it also is significant bearing in mind the future demographics. Commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights is therefore a valuable investment in human rights, the status of women and sustainable development.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, allow me to underline that gender issues and gender equality are not only about women, but it is of special importance to emphasize also the role of men and boys in this regard. Achieving gender equality and the promotion and protection of human rights for both women and men, as well as for girls and boys, are tasks for us all. Gender mainstreaming is one of the key objectives of the Finnish Government and Finland fully commits itself to this important work.

*Thank You.*