



The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations

**Statement by
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Permanent Representative**

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Mr. Chair,

Allow me to start by congratulating you and other members of the Bureau with your election to this very important committee. You can rest assured that the Icelandic Delegation will work with the Bureau in the spirit of cooperation throughout this session.

Mr. Chair,

Our greatest achievement on advancing women's rights at the international level has to be the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW. Iceland attaches great importance to the universal ratification and full implementation of the Convention and calls upon all States that have not yet done so to ratify or accede to CEDAW. We also call upon those States which have made reservations that are incompatible with the purposes and objective of the treaty, to immediately withdraw them.

In general terms we also want to emphasize the importance of the commitments made by all of us in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and reiterate the need to speed up the implementation of these commitments at all levels. Here, gender mainstreaming is key and all stakeholders, including Member States, the UN system itself and civil society, must reinforce their efforts.

It is extremely important for gender equality and women's empowerment to be promoted more effectively in all UN processes, most significantly in the number of international processes culminating in 2015, where the integration of a gender perspective to ensure full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is crucial.

In this regard integration of a gender perspective should be a priority for all Member States for the preparation for the post-MDG 2015 process which includes the GA Special event to follow up efforts made towards achieving the MDGs in 2013 and the HLP/Summit in 2015. This also applies to the implementation of Rio+20 which will be underway throughout 2013-2015, including the process on developing SDG's.

We need to reinforce our common efforts to ensure that the overriding objective is always to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment - with zero tolerance for backlashes on commitments made.

Mr. Chair,

The fight against violence against women, including human trafficking is high on the agenda of the Icelandic Government. Iceland has ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Palermo Protocol, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and the Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse which will enter into force at the beginning of 2013.

We have a National Action Plan in place and a task force which includes government representatives, including from police and immigration authorities as well as civil society. The task force is intended to ensure the coordination of efforts and information exchange. It is also tasked with identifying potential victims and providing them with protection and assistance, as well as being responsible for the implementation of the National Action Plan and advising the Government on human trafficking.

Among the accomplishments derived from the Action Plan is legislation criminalising the act of buying individuals for the purposes of prostitution as well as outlawing strip clubs. In addition the criminal code has been amended so that penalties for sex trafficking are now in line with penalties for other serious crimes. Furthermore, recognizing the importance of education and awareness raising, students at the National Police College are now trained on recognising and investigating human trafficking and the police has issued guidelines for victim identification.

Mr. Chair,

In few areas is the need for access to effective sexual and reproductive health services more apparent than in the case of maternal mortality and obstetric fistula. It is one of the clearest examples of health inequity in the world. While obstetric fistula has been eliminated in industrialized countries, obstructed labor still continues to be one of the major causes of maternal mortality in developing countries. We need to address the underlying determinants of this problem with focus on prevention.

Iceland is a staunch supporter of the campaign to end fistula and efforts to improve maternal health worldwide. The campaign has already demonstrated that tangible results can be achieved in eradicating this silent epidemic. We encourage more countries to become direct financial supporters of the campaign so that the goal of eradicating this scourge, that causes so much suffering to women and their families, can be realized.

Mr. Chair,

Allow me also to express Iceland's support for the initiative of the African group to intensify global efforts for the elimination of FGM - female genital mutilation. We believe the high-level meeting organized by Benin and Burkina Faso during the General Debate sent a strong signal of the commitment of our leaders on this issue. Iceland is committed to this issue and joined the group of supporters of the joint UNICEF-UNFPA programme on FGM/C in 2011. Even though we have not yet reached our common goal of a global ban the programme has demonstrated, that together, we can make a difference on this critical issue.

Mr. Chair,

Finally, it is not possible at this point in time to talk about the advancement of women without mentioning the extremely courageous Malala Yousafzai, from Pakistan, who has been fighting so courageously for the right of girls to education and has now been severely injured by some ill informed and backward looking male members of her society. She has set a good example to us all by doing what we all need to do, to speak up, no matter what. At her very young age she has been practicing for years what Dag Hammarskjöld once said, and I quote "Never for the sake of peace and quiet, deny your own experience or convictions".

Thank you, Mr. Chair