



PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
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**CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST WOMEN;  
CONSIDERATION OF THE FIFTH AND SIXTH PERIODIC REPORTS OF FINLAND  
BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST  
WOMEN**

**ADDRESS BY THE DELEGATION OF FINLAND  
NEW YORK 9 JULY 2008**

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women****41<sup>st</sup> session****30 June - 18 July 2008, New York**

New York, 9 July 2008

Madam Chairperson,  
Distinguished Members of the Committee,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the delegation of Finland I wish to express our gratitude for having this opportunity to present for your Committee's consideration the fifth and sixth periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Government regards the consideration of periodic reports by the treaty bodies as a fruitful a part of international monitoring of human rights conventions.

The Government's latest report, the sixth, was submitted in November 2007. It thereby covers the preceding four years, and accordingly, the fifth report the same four years before that. So, we have today under your Committee's consideration in fact a period of total eight and a half years. That is a considerable period of time.

These reports, as all our periodic reports to the treaty bodies, are the outcome of effective cooperation with the relevant ministries and other authorities, as well as result of participation of civil society with their written and/or oral comments. This way of proceeding is a standard procedure followed since 1990's.

Next I would like to present some main issues and recent measures taken in the subject matter under consideration.

## **Violence against women**

Although the legislation, policies and programmes and, in principle, also the public attitude in Finland condemn violence against women, according to a national survey the figures describing the amount of this violence have unfortunately remained about the same between in the period of 1997 to 2005.

As one response to that situation in Finland there is going on this year, as a part of the Council of Europe campaign "Stop Domestic violence against women", a media campaign to influence people's attitudes towards violence. This campaign is targeted in particular at men and decision-makers. The Government has funded the campaign to be implemented by a NGO. It is also supported by the Parliament.

In spring this year, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health set up an inter-ministerial working-group with a mandate to coordinate, develop and internally monitor and evaluate policies on domestic violence and violence against women.

Furthermore, there is the Government's Internal Security Programme for 2008-2011 one section of which deals with the reduction of violence in intimate partner relationships, especially against women. Thereby one of the objectives is to strengthen nation-widely the support services for victims, in particular concerning shelters and safe homes.

Another measure in the same Programme is to increase the awareness of the so-called honour related crimes and female genital mutilation by training relevant professionals.

Further important proposal is to strengthen the work to prevent domestic violence and violence against women by setting up a national research and development unit linked to the research institution under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The task of the unit is to coordinate the work to reinforce the knowledge and skills and to support the regional and local work. Its establishment is aimed to take place in 2009.

For the prevention of interpersonal and domestic violence, in May 2008 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities provided municipalities with the recommendations that stress the importance of strategic planning and comprehensive approach. The implementation of these recommendations will be assessed in 2011.

A new political assessment has been made concerning domestic violence legislation. The Ministry of Justice is currently examining how previous history of violence against a person in a close relationship with the offender could be taken into account in measuring of the punishment in a new trial against the same offender. Also, the Ministry of Justice is examining the possibility of revising the right to institute criminal proceedings for assault so that even such a petty assault in a close relationship would always be an offence subject to public prosecution.

In order to promote the effective and fair enforcement of criminal liability there is now the so-called key and special prosecutor system in Finland. From the beginning of 2008 there have been the first five key prosecutors, all of them specialized in offences against women and children. Their duty is to maintain and develop, by instructing and advising and acting as a trainer on different occasions, the professional skills of other prosecutors in a certain field of crime requiring special skills and expertise.

### **Trafficking in human beings**

The Government's new Internal Security Programme contains actions for preventing human trafficking. It focuses on awareness-raising and dissemination of information. In addition, training is one of the most important requirements in combating human trafficking.

The revised National Plan of Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, adopted by the Government two weeks ago, on 25 June 2008, deserves to be mentioned here. This plan - which represents an update and further specification of the measures described in the first 2005 Plan of Action and is based on experiences from the implementation of those very measures - contains a comprehensive description of future action to be taken. Its principal aim is to lower the threshold of the victim

identification. The Ombudsman for Minorities will be appointed the national rapporteur.

Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior has made its own Plan of Action against trafficking and is responsible for assisting the trafficking of victims. The system of assisting victims was launched during 2006 at the Joutseno and Oulu reception centers, as a part of the reception of asylum seekers. Services and supporting actions include legal and other advice, interpretation services, crisis counseling, support services, social and health care services and accommodation or housing and other necessary care.

### **Legislation of non-discrimination**

The Equality Committee, set by the Ministry of Justice, which Committee is commissioned to prepare a proposal for new non-discrimination legislation, issued its interim report on February 2008 and the report was sent out for comments during the same month.

On the basis of the feedback, the Committee has decided that the emphasis of the reform will be placed on the Anti-Discrimination Act and related legislation. The main focus will thereby lie on discrimination on grounds other than gender. Under these circumstances, it seems unlikely that the Committee would continue examining in further detail the option of consolidating the existing legislation.

One of the objectives of the reform is to examine how the co-operation and co-ordination of activities between various equality bodies could be improved. Authorities which deal with discrimination are, for instance, the Gender Equality Ombudsman and the Ombudsman for Minorities. The Committee is to issue its final report by the end of October 2009.

The Åland Islands constitute a separate jurisdiction according to a decision by the League of Nations in 1921, when it was given autonomy as a solution for minority protection. The population was guaranteed the preservation of the Swedish language and culture. In 2007, the Act on Gender Equality has been amended so that its

supervision, due to the small administration, was trusted to the Discrimination Ombudsman. The Åland Islands Government Program of 2006 contains a special chapter on gender equality. It may also be mentioned that the Åland Islands authorities have taken an action to combat violence against women, including men in the decision-making of the project.

### **Minority women**

In the 2001 examination of the Government's earlier two reports your Committee has expressed its concern at the continuing discrimination against immigrant and minority women living in Finland, particularly Roma and Sámi women, who suffer from double discrimination, based on both their sex and ethnic background.

#### *Women with disabilities*

As to women with disabilities, the Finnish society's attitude towards women with disabilities is different from that towards men with disabilities. It is particularly important to support disabled women's' right to family life and children. Women with disabilities need high-class advice concerning sexual and reproductive health and adequate professional help and support for attending to everyday matters and taking care of children. The social welfare and health care system tries to implement this consideration by the twin-track approach, *i.e.*, mainstreamed services supported with special services.

Finland has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol on 30 March 2007. We will ratify it later after the necessary legislative amendments have been accomplished.

#### *Sámi women*

During the last years the Government has focused on developing social and health services in the Sámi language. Promising results can already be seen concerning the

day care for Sámi speaking children and older persons. The Government gives earmarked financial support to municipalities in the Sámi homeland area in order to launch new programmes, services and supportive measures for the Sámi people in the social and health field. An implementation programme is drawn up together with the Sámi council.

In 2008 the Ombudsman for Children, working in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, published her study on the opinions and experiences of Sámi children and young people aged 13 to 18 regarding their well-being. The study showed that young Sámi boys and girls have the same concerns as other children. Most young Sámi boys and girls regard their Sámi ethnicity as very positive, and they have a strong Sámi identity.

#### *Roma women*

As to the labour market, according to the yet unpublished study on the Roma People in the Labour Market by the Ministry of Employment and the Economy (2008) Roma women themselves are ready to be rather flexible about the use of traditional clothing in the labour market. It appears that, in working places there have been created suitable models and solutions to the culturally challenging situations.

There are four regional and more than 20 local Roma Boards in operation to assist the municipalities. Finland's first Roma Women's Association "KROMANA" was established in 2006. The purpose of the association is to improve the Roma women's and their families' health, education and employment. KROMANA has received public funding in order to improve Roma women's social and other well-being and raise their influence in issues concerning themselves.

#### *Immigrant women*

The 1999 *Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers* (Integration Act emphasises the immigrants' own responsibility to participate actively in their integration process and provides authorities with tools for supporting the

integration process. One of these tools is the *Individual Integration Plan*, an agreement detailing the measures supporting the integration of the immigrant and their family. The Act requires that local authorities draw up a *Local Integration Programme*, which includes the measures for the promotion of integration at local level.

Municipalities together with the third sector organize to immigrants, especially immigrant women, language courses and guidance to the Finnish society. Personal guidance is essential especially in the first phase of integration.

Immigrant women do not know Finnish legislation and service systems as well as other citizens. Immigrants need correct information in a comprehensible form.

In the planning of local operating models for work against violence, it would be desirable to take separate account of minorities.

The problems of immigrant families are reflected in the fact that while their percentage of the population of the greater Helsinki Area is approximately 8%, they account for as much as about 30% of the clientele in shelters. The situation is also due to their lack of social networks, which makes women with an immigrant background seek help from authorities more often than women of the majority population do when experiencing violence in intimate and family relationships.

The largest immigrant groups come to construction and metal industries, which are strongly male dominated fields. Many of those men are permanently living in their home country and they are pendeling between Finland and home country. Immigrant women, on the other hand, are working mostly in service sector (e.g. cleaning, trade) and family restaurant occupations, and they are mostly living already in Finland.

There are still prejudices in workplaces and the immigrants are still marginal labour force. A national employment and entrepreneurship project for immigrants will start in October 2008. For that purpose 40 consultants will be trained in the local employment administration. The consultants will attend workplaces and give information about equal treatment at workplaces, of ethnic minorities and foreigners, religious minorities, people with disabilities, elderly people as well as sexual minorities.



## **Women in decision-making**

### *Political decision-making*

As to women in decision-making, it should be noted the proportion of women among Finland's politicians and other social decision-makers has grown in recent years. The parliamentary elections follow the proportional representation principle. Today, in Finland there is a female President, and women's proportion of the members of parliament is 42 per cent. In addition, women account for 60 per cent of the ministers in the present Government.

The percentage of women in elected bodies has been slowly increasing. Of the members of local councils elected in the 2004 local elections, 36 per cent were women. This was two per cent more than in the previous elections four years back.

### *Economic decision-making*

One aim is to increase the number of women in the economic decision-making. But not only on the amount of women is important, but also on the gender expertise and the ability to mainstream gender perspective into the decision-making at all levels and at all stages.

Wholly or partly state-owned businesses have served as examples of increasing the number of women in administrative boards. The target for these businesses was that women should account for at least 40 per cent of the members of their administrative boards. This has been achieved.

The Government is co-operating with the private sector on gender equality. The aim is to convince them of the positive impact of having more women on the top management in the private sector.

A study conducted in autumn 2007 by the employees' organization, the Finnish Business and Policy Forum, showed that in Finland businesses with female managing directors were financially more successful than those managed by men.

During the consideration in 2001, your Committee expressed its concern over continuing discrimination in employment in Finland.

### **Wage gap**

As to the wage gap, pay differentials between the sexes have emerged within decades, and are not easily being eliminated. It may be recalled that in 2006 the Government and the labour market organisations launched an equal pay programme. The general objective is to diminish the gap between women's and men's pay by at least 5 percentage units by 2015, from the present about 20 per cent to 15 per cent.

It is challenging to achieve the set objective. It will require the pursued collective agreement policy to produce higher average pay increases for women than for men. During the last collective agreement round in 2007 to 2008, women received, indeed, slightly higher average nominal increases than men. Exceptionally, the female-dominated local authorities sector took the lead in pay, when the Government allocated a special appropriation for pay increases in female-dominated sectors.

Pay differentials are not only being reduced by means of collective agreement policy but also by reforming pay systems, reducing segregation, encouraging fathers to use family leave more often, and promoting women's career development, to mention some examples.

### **Segregation of education and working careers**

As to segregation of education and working careers, in 2008 started a two year project for promoting gender sensitive development of teaching and teacher training. The focus is in unravelling stereotypes in all school processes, increasing gender conscious teaching and developing new methods for equality education to tackle the segregation.

The amendment of the Act on Equality in 2005 broadened the obligation of the equality planning in educational organisations. In 2009, the situation of equality

planning in these vocational institutions, high schools and universities of applied sciences will be assessed.

There are several new programmes that are being implemented in order to tackle the gender segregation in education and working life. In 2008 started a follow up research project on the quantity and quality of equality plans prepared in the country.

In addition, for decreasing gender segregation and supporting women's entrepreneurship a national Programme for Furthering and Mainstreaming of Gender Equality is being implemented in 2007-2013. This programme financed partly by European Social Fund within the sphere of European Union, supports development of different strategies in gender equality mainstreaming in the employment and the economy sector.

### **Women as entrepreneurs**

Out of the Finnish entrepreneurs about one third are women. The Government is aiming at getting their share into 40 per cent. For that purpose a working group appointed at the end of May 2008 by the Ministry of Labour is going to clarify the obstacles and incentives of women's entrepreneurship in 2008-2009. One of the obstacles is the costs of parental leaves, because also women entrepreneurs' employees are mostly female.

More than 60 % of women's enterprises work in the service sector. A big challenge is to expand their field of selection into sectors where they are underrepresented.

### **Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2008-2011**

A few words on Government Action plan for Gender Equality. The Action Plan for Gender Equality will be adopted at the Government session next Thursday, on 17 July.

The Government has decided to gather the most important equality measures under an action plan for gender equality. This plan contains seven priorities based on the

current Government programme, among others reducing pay differentials, promoting women's carriers, raising equality awareness in schools and reducing gender segregation in education and in the labour market. Prevention of violence against women is one of the priorities in this action plan. The proposal is to launch a comprehensive national action Programme to combat violence against women.

Mainstreaming of gender equality is a key objective of government's gender equality policy. It is applied, among the others, in the drafting of law and in state budget procedures. Training is available for the staff of ministries in order to raise the awareness and to give tools for gender mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is implemented also in performance guidance processes.

The Government will prepare a report on equality between women and men and submit it to Parliament in early 2010. It will be the first equality report ever prepared by the Finnish Government. Moreover, in 2009, the Government will give Parliament a report on the functioning of the Act on Equality between Women and Men.

### **Gender budgeting**

Few words about the gender budgeting.

Promoting gender equality requires direct budget allocations. The Government Programme 2007-2011 states that more resources will be allocated to government agencies and women's organisations engaged in promoting gender issues. In 2007 the Parliament also approved an Act that regularises the largest women's organisations in Finland a yearly state subsidy.

### **Security Council Resolution 1325**

Finland is committed to the aims of Security Council Resolution 1325 and has hence integrated them into our relevant external policies and our development assistance. We are now in the process of finalizing the National Action Plan for the implementation of 1325. The Plan covers the areas of women's role and participation in conflict

prevention, peace consolidation and peace building; gender-issues in crisis management and peacekeeping, including recruitment and training; as well as the protection of women. The Plan will be launched after summer time in September.

Nonetheless, although there still remains work to be done in Finland as regards gender equality, I am confident that the overall situation in Finland is of good quality. It is also obvious that we all need to be constantly ready to respond to new challenges in the protection and promotion of gender equality.

Madame Chairperson, Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen we appreciate this possibility to continue our constructive dialogue with the Committee.