



**INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT
BY THE HEAD OF THE GREEK DELEGATION**

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**AT THE CONSIDERATION BY THE UN COMMITTEE
ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST WOMEN
OF THE SEVENTH PERIODIC REPORT OF GREECE
SUBMITTED UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION
ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS
OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

**GENEVA
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*Madame Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,*

It is an honour for me to appear before your Committee in order to present and discuss the 7th Periodic Report of Greece, submitted under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

It is not my intention today to present to you an embellished picture of the situation of women in Greece. Our country, as indeed all countries, still has a long way to go in order to achieve the level of equality we all desire for our society. The financial crisis we are going through has influenced the Greek society in a variety of ways still to be fathomed, as its development has been cataclysmic. There is adversity engendered by its effects, but there is also opportunity for action, as we firmly believe.

Today, I am here to discuss with you the efforts undertaken by the Greek State, in order to address various forms of discrimination against women. I intend to focus on the major results achieved thus far, as well as on the problems that we intend to tackle, especially now, as our country is in the midst of the worst financial crisis of its recent history.

Before I begin, I would like to introduce the members of our delegation:

- Myself, as Secretary General for Gender Equality of Greece. The **General Secretariat for Gender Equality**, of which I am the Head, is an organizational unit of the Hellenic Ministry of the Interior and constitutes the competent **governmental body** in the field of gender equality. It deals with the formulation, monitoring and implementation of relevant gender policies and measures in all sectors and fields.
- Ms **Anna Megalou**, Head of the Department of International Cooperation and International Organizations at the General Secretariat for Gender Equality
- Ms **Ifigeneia Katsaridou**, Senior Official, Directorate of European Policy and International Cooperation at the General Secretariat for Gender Equality
- Ms **Maria-Eleni Iliou**, Jurist, Special Advisor to the Secretary General for Gender Equality
- Mr **Loukas Karatsolis**, Head of Human Rights Directorate, Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- Mr **Elias Kastanas**, Deputy Legal Adviser, Special Legal Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Dr **Heracles Moskoff**, National Coordinator against Trafficking in Human Beings, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

*Madame Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,*

Awareness of our deficits in gender equality has been greatly raised throughout the years, both by the preparation of our Periodic Reports to your Committee and by the Committee's Concluding Observations. As a result, we have been concentrating our efforts on the achievement of both **de jure** and **de facto** equality.

In Greece, a range of multilevel legislative provisions have already delimited, to a great extent, the institutional framework for a **de jure** compliance with the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination on the basis of gender, in all aspects of social life. The scope of implementation has been broadened recently, to cover new needs arising by developments in the labour market, in family life and in society in general. After all, the enhancement of the legislative framework of gender equality constitutes a significant policy tool for the protection of women's rights.

Compliance with the Convention, as well as the will of the Greek State to take initiatives and measures to promote the implementation of gender equality are evident in the following recent legislative acts.

- A 2012 law, ratifying of the amendment to Article 20, paragraph 1 of the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women which aims at strengthening the monitoring capacity of your Committee,
- the law for the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in self employment

- A 2010 law on the ratification and implementation the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, as well as its three protocols,
- the law for the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities for men and women in matters of work and employment
- A 2009 law for the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities of men and women as regards access to goods and services.

Our country, I must add, has been one of the first thirteen countries to sign the European Convention for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence. Our country is now in the process of its ratification.

Actual implementation of the above legislative framework is significantly assisted by the work of the Greek Ombudsman, an Independent Authority.

The Gender Equality Department of the Greek Ombudsman, active since May 2008, monitors the application of the principle of equal treatment of men and women in employment and occupation. By way of exception, they may investigate cases of gender discrimination associated with the conditions of service of employees in the civil service, and, with a recent law (2012), they have been given jurisdiction over matters of deviation from the principle of equal treatment between self employed women and men.

The Ombudsman forms partnerships such as their cooperation with the Labour Inspectorate (provided for in Law 3488/2006), in cases of complaints against a private sector employer. They also cooperate with the General Secretariat of Gender Equality of the Ministry of the Interior and the Department of Gender Equality of the Ministry of Employment to raise the awareness of both the administration and the public, regarding equality issues.

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Greece, as you know, has been facing in the past few years a challenge unprecedented in its recent history. The global financial crisis which all countries are trying to navigate through, has hit us more than most. It has exacerbated problems we were in the process of tackling and has brought up new ones. The social fabric in Greece is straining under the weight of unemployment, social protection and health care deficits and the ensuing inequalities, as well as tension underlying life in the public sphere and violence erupting in the private sphere. Multiple discrimination becomes harder to tackle, as the consequences of the financial crisis hit harder the vulnerable groups (aged women, migrant women, women with disabilities and so on). Illegal immigration in general, constitutes a problem of tremendous proportions, which aggravates various social issues, especially at a time when global economy is facing dire straits that push people towards migration. Under the circumstances, the rights of women and all that has been gained in recent years must be protected and the struggle towards de facto equality must continue.

Before I go on, let me stress for one more time the importance Greece attaches to the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women as a prevalent tool for the promotion of the rights of women.

The importance we attach to the Observations of this Committee is equally great.

The Concluding Observations of your Committee after the consideration of our country's 6th Periodic Report were translated and sent to the offices of all Secretaries General of all Ministries, to be taken into consideration in their policy design and implementation. They were also sent to the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament for dissemination, and they were presented to the press through a press release. They are annexed, together with Greece's relevant responses, in our 7th Periodic Report to your Committee. Our 7th Periodic Report has been printed both in English and Greek and distributed. The relevant text can also be found on the General Secretariat's for Gender Equality website. The various non-governmental organizations in the field

have been accordingly informed in their meetings with the General Secretariat for Gender Equality.

Allow me at this point to briefly mention the measures taken by the Greek State in compliance with your Committee's Concluding Observations.

To combat the persistence of gender stereotypes, we have undertaken actions in the field of the mass media (in cooperation with the Greek National Radio and Television and the Greek National Council for Radio and Television, an Independent Authority), the field of reconciliation of family and professional life and the field of education (in cooperation with the competent Ministry).

While justice is equally accessible to men and women in Greece, heeding your recommendation regarding the need for provision of legal aid services and sensitization about how to utilize available legal resources against discrimination, we have created (and are still in the process of creating more) Counseling Centres which provide legal information and counseling, to operate in all the regions of the country. In collaboration with bar associations across the country, they will also provide legal representation for women victims of violence.

The work done by our Counseling Centres is extensive and multifaceted as they also cater for women facing multiple discrimination (migrant women, Roma women, women with disabilities and so on) as well as women victims of violence. Our SOS 24-hour hotline provides advice and counseling and is operational. We have also been training public officials (police officers, medical and nursing staff etc) to treat victims of gender-based violence.

As far as trafficking is concerned, as I have already mentioned, the Greek Parliament has ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Human Beings, especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. It has been incorporated into national law and it has brought about significant changes, for example, by extending the existing law to all foreign victims of trafficking, not only to third country nationals as was the case before, ensuring provision of protection regardless of cooperation of non-victims with

the competent authorities, amending the Criminal Code to cover not only labour exploitation but begging as well, extending the protective provisions of Greek legislation to victims of trafficking and persons identified as victims of trafficking in migrants and creating measures to protect witnesses in criminal acts of trafficking and smuggling of migrants.

In Greece, participation of women in decision-making centres is low in some sectors, but there has been improvement and there are actions in place to enhance it even more. The percentage of women in the Greek Parliament today is relatively low, but reaching approximately 20 to 21%, it constitutes the highest percentage of women Members the Hellenic Parliament has ever had.

Participation of women in the election process in regional and local elections as well as in national and European elections is being promoted through programmes especially designed for their empowerment and the retrenchment of stereotypes in the field of political life. There are also actions currently being implemented to promote the participation of women in economic decision-making centres and in the unions and associations of the social partners.

In tertiary education the percentage of women is higher than that of men and has been rising in recent years.

In employment, the parliament has enacted three laws: One in 2009, regarding the implementation of the principle of equal treatment of men and women with regard to access to goods and services (it introduces the prohibition of indirect gender-based discrimination), one in 2010, regarding the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of labour and employment and one in 2012, regarding the implementation of the principle of equal treatment of men and women in self employment. A variety of programmes and actions aiming towards a better position of women in the labour market, including affirmative action, has been and is being implemented.

The work of the Labour Inspectorate, as well as that of the Greek Ombudsman has been instrumental in the monitoring and control of the implementation of the above laws.

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Today, faced with an admittedly grave financial situation, we continue on our dual approach to the promotion of gender equality. On the one hand, we design and implement specialised equality policies to promote and empower the participation of women in sectors in which they are underrepresented, and on the other, we perform cross-cutting interventions throughout the range of public policy, so as to tackle gender-based discrimination in each and every field of policy implementation.

The new conditions, which the crisis has brought into focus, have made imperative a change of course in the main policies implemented in all fields and even more so in a horizontal field of policy implementation, such as gender equality.

As a consequence, the main policy axes in the field of gender equality have changed towards stressing first of all, equal female participation in the labour market, secondly, the prevention and elimination of all forms of gender-based violence, gender mainstreaming in social protection and health, promotion of women's participation in decision-making and public life, and finally, gender mainstreaming in all policy areas and the monitoring of its implementation.

Our efforts towards **de facto** gender equality follow these axes and comprise specific actions.

In this time of severe unemployment we empower women to keep their jobs by implementing a programme of actions targeting employed women, especially those

whose work positions are at risk, and self employed women, helping them develop entrepreneurial initiatives with a view to remain active in the market.

The actions include individual information, consultation, training, mentoring, supporting and boosting adjustability and career-planning. They will be carried out by agencies, associations of agencies or agency partnerships of the public or the non-profit private sector, which in their organizational regulations mention explicitly as their purpose the design, organization and implementation of actions of counseling, mentoring, training and education, provided that they have the capacity to implement these measures using their own resources.

Addressing the problem of violence against women, we are in the process of creating 14 Counseling Centres, covering all the regions of Greece, aiming to combat gender-based violence of all sorts and support women who suffer from or are threatened with violence.

The Counseling Centres constitute front line services for the provision of immediate assistance to women victims of violence, but they also implement actions of prevention and awareness-raising at the regional level. They provide socio-psychological support as well as legal consultation to women victims of violence, they implement actions of awareness-raising in the local communities, in cooperation with bar associations they also provide legal aid to women victims of violence as well as, in the case of the Counseling Centre of Athens (the Poly-centre), advice to women as regards matters of sexual and reproductive health.

Seven of these Counseling Centres are already operational, while the completion of the other seven is already under way.

The distribution of the Counseling Centres throughout the regions allows them to provide support also to vulnerable groups of women which may unevenly distributed in the different regions, especially to women victims of multiple discrimination such

as addicted women, migrant women, women with disabilities, homeless women, Roma women and so on.

At the local level, in cooperation with municipalities throughout the country, we have already launched a programme for the creation of 19 Shelters for women victims of violence, as well as 25 more Counseling Centres.

A 24-hour SOS helpline for immediate provision of assistance to women victims of violence is operational, offering its services both in Greek and in English. In the first 18 months of its operation (11/3/2011-11/9/2012) it accepted 7676 calls and 53 emails.

A scientific committee to monitor the implemented actions has already been formed and it has already coordinated the production of a Guide and Training material for the professionals operating the Counseling Centres and the Helpline.

The scientific committee is also preparing protocols of cooperation between the General Secretariat for Gender Equality and the Greek Police, the Judiciary and so on, as well as a Guide for Networking.

A campaign for prevention and awareness-raising regarding all forms of violence against women (such as domestic violence, sexual harassment and trafficking) is under way, comprising actions such as conferences, forums, printed material, visual and audiovisual material, releases to the press, radio and TV campaigns, creation of blogs, banners on internet sites and so on. Specific categories of the material are also produced in foreign languages spoken by large groups of migrant women.

On 22nd November 2012, a programme agreement was signed between the General Secretariat for Gender Equality and the “Helena Venizelou” General and Maternity District Hospital.

The programme agreement refers to permanent and regular cooperation in joint actions for the protection of women's sexual and reproductive health, as well as preventing and combating violence against women.

As a first move for the implementation of this programme agreement, the Hospital has placed a midwife-advisor on matters of sexual and reproductive health in the Counseling Centre of Athens who, once a week offers her advisory services to women.

The hospital also organizes informational lectures on things women must know about their body and health, family programming (including Sexually Transmitted Diseases and in vitro fertilization), and breast feeding.

To promote women's participation in public life and enhance their participation in political, social and economic decision-making centres, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality is implementing a wide range of actions.

Actions to enhance women's participation in regional and local administration are implemented, including a relevant website, informational seminars and awareness raising actions.

To enhance women's participation in national and European elections, a programme of actions is currently under way, implemented by the Centre for Research on Gender Equality. Actions have been designed for women already elected at the national or European level, women candidates who haven't been elected, political parties and institutions that constitute decision-making centres regarding the electoral process. Actions include survey and research regarding women's participation in decision-making centres, training seminars for women candidates, the creation of a special website (already created and operational) and the production of relevant material. The above actions are under way in view of the upcoming national and European parliament elections in 2014.

A multilayered set of actions to promote the participation of women in unions and associations of the social partners is also under way, aiming both to encourage women to participate in such unions and associations and to empower them to claim decision-making positions within such institutions.

It is obvious that all the actions mentioned till now, by aiming at the empowerment of women, simultaneously aim at combating the gender stereotypes that breed gender inequalities and gender-based violence.

To achieve more effective gender mainstreaming, we are implementing an action plan aiming to create relevant methodologies and tools, devise relevant actions and evaluate them.

The actions in question, drawn horizontally and in coherence with other State policies, target all levels of administration, that is, Local, Regional and Central Administration, to encourage them to systematically introduce equality policies in their programmes.

They include the production of three Guides for Implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming System, one for each level of Administration: Municipalities, Regions and Ministries.

The actions also include specifying the Gender Mainstreaming System according to the body or agency that is implementing it, and a pilot implementation by designing Local and Regional Equality Programmes.

Finally, the development of a new mechanism, an Observatory, is under way, to monitor and evaluate the implemented gender equality policies through the development of an Integrated Information System and a National System of Gender Indicators.

*Madame Chairperson,
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The Greek State places great importance on matters of gender equality, especially now, in these turbulent times of the financial crisis. With women constituting more than half of our country's population and a pool of talent, skills and knowledge, it is only fair to assume that women's equal participation in all fields of political, social and economic life is the only viable road to development, something our country is these days in dire need of.

We realize that despite the adversity presented by the harsh economic climate, we must continue and boost our efforts towards gender equality, addressing at the same time the serious problems that have arisen in recent years.

We are adamant in our commitment to continue striving for gender equality in all fields and areas of life and we look upon your Committee as an experienced body whose recommendations will provide us with guidelines to assist us in our efforts.

Thank you for your attention.