

**Commission on the Status of Women - Fifty-fourth session
- 1-12 March 2010**

Mr. Chair,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

1. It is an honour for me to address the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, firstly as a representative of the Greek Government at a critical moment for Greece; and secondly as a participant at the 4th World United Nations Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995 in my capacity as a feminist, trade union representative and activist for peace and peaceful resolution of conflict. Fifteen years later I can definitely state, YES there have been changes and not only on the biological level. There have been changes that we have so many reasons to be proud of. Every woman police officer I see on the streets of Athens, I want to cry out, bravo good for you! Every woman driver I see on a public transportation vehicle, I am with her all down the way. When girls and women reached the 54% in tertiary education, and 53% women in decision-making in the Regions; I say, I have lived to see the day.
2. I wish I will live to see the day for Peace in the Middle East. And my Israeli and Palestinian sisters fighting side by side in all decision-making processes for ever lasting peace and for a better future for their sons and daughters. I wish I will live to see the day for a United Cyprus when my Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot sisters will be working for ever lasting peace and for a better future for their sons and daughters. We have lived to see the day for so much with regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women. And even if we

do not live to see the day.....we have contributed to the sowing of the seeds.....And yet there is something so wrong when 500.000, - women die every year because of maternity mortality when these deaths could have been prevented. There is definitely something wrong when "honour crimes" are still occurring on the physical level (taking a woman's life) and "honour crimes" are still occurring on the psychological level, preventing girls and women from undertaking their own responsibility and making their own choices in life. What I am trying to say is that men and women on the whole of planet Earth are all cells belonging to one body. We cannot have a healthy body when our sisters and brothers are in pain, because they are cells of our body in pain. We need gender equality and we need justice and we need to become aware and fully conscious of our UNITY as humanity.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

3. A new socialist government was elected by the Greek people in October 2009 under the leadership of Prime Minister George Papandreou. George Papandreou's perspective to gender equality and women's human rights is well known to the Greek people and internationally within the framework of his mandate as President of the Socialist International. His political will has been made perfectly clear, amidst an economic crisis, the hardest that the Greek people have encountered in the last 36 years since the restoration of democracy. Our new Prime Minister moved with regard to gender equality faster than the electoral body appointing 50% of women on his party's candidate list for the European parliamentary elections; 9 women to his cabinet, percentage of 25% and appointing 9 women in a total number of 13 General

Secretaries for the Administrative Regions, percentage of 53%; this is the highest percentage for women in political decision-making, in the history of Greece.

4. Our new General Secretary for Gender Equality was appointed by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Justice, Transparency and Human Rights, end November 2009. Within the last four months and because of the economic crisis and the impact of this crisis on women Maria Stratigaki and her team are working intensively to create the conditions that will sustain the achievements to the rights of women, to promote the role of women in decision-making through their active participation as agents for change and to make the best use possible of every single euro coming to Greece through the European Social Funds for gender equality.

5. The measures that the government has been obliged to take due to the critical situation of the Greek economy are painful to the people. Unemployment will be increasing, income will be reduced, and the social security and protection system is on the social dialogue table, looking for responses to difficult questions (aging population, youth unemployment, combining work, care & family responsibilities). The trade unions are struggling for a fair distribution of the costs of the crisis.

6. The structural changes being put forward by the Government with regard to the green economy, the rights for migrants, cutting down of the bureaucracy, combating corruption with specific measures for transparency and public scrutiny, are for the benefit of the people as a whole and especially beneficial to women who benefit the most when transparent processes, clear and clean guidelines and dialogue are put into place.

7. The Greek government in close cooperation with women's organizations and NGOs has worked intensively on each one of

the critical areas of concern and has made progress that we are proud of. There are areas, however, that the government needs to further elaborate upon, Media for example; **what has happened to MEDIA?** Good question and this does not concern the Greek government only. **Environment? The girl-child? Women & armed conflict?** These areas are challenging taking into consideration the multiple discrimination that many women face; global and national environmental issues; and the sexualization of society projecting young girls and women as sex objects. Yes, we must recognize the universality of the BPfA critical areas of concern. There is a difference of degree in which we come across them and there is also a difference of the path they come by. Look at girl child marriages, for example, and adolescent fertility and then look at adolescent fertility and abortions in Europe; and the need for a broader concept of sexuality education to include assertiveness and empowerment of women.

9. With regard to Challenges: I would like to note the danger, that the current economic crisis that Greece is encountering could become a social crisis due to restrictive economic policy measures. There will be a strong gender dimension to this crisis with regard to women's unemployment, the gender pay gap, social provisions for care etc.; also with regard to the situation of migrant women, women refugees, disabled women, Roma women, who suffer multiple forms of discrimination.

10. With regard to Actions: the Government is organizing a press conference on International Women's Day, in Athens, to present its comprehensive Programme for gender equality and the empowerment of women 2010-2013. This programme will be focusing on three main areas of concern: a) Reform of legislation b) Action programmes to be implemented by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality on the economical, political, social, civil and cultural levels c) gender mainstreaming

of actions to be implemented by the Ministries of Labour, Education, Interior, and Agriculture.

10. The 4th World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995 was a milestone for Greek women, empowering them to further their struggles for the advancement of women in all areas of life. The work on Gender Equality by the Greek government has been guided by the European Union framework; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. The fifteen years since the Beijing World Conference have been important for Greece in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, with achievements for women in key areas of concern. Greece reaffirms today its commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (1995) and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000).

Thank you.

Fotini Sianou
National Representative to the United Nations
on Gender Equality-GREECE
e-mail: fotini.sianou@kede.org
mobile: 0030 - 69 78 25 85 45