

**Statement by Mrs Solveiga Silkalna,
Special envoy of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Latvia,
Head of Delegation of the Republic of Latvia at the 54th session of the
UN Commission on the Status of Women
(1 – 12 March 2010, New York)**

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset I join previous speakers in extending sympathy to the victims of the recent natural disasters in Haiti and Chile.

Latvia aligns itself with the statement made by the Kingdom of Spain on behalf of the European Union. We reaffirm our strong commitment to the Beijing Platform of Action as an indispensable tool for ensuring a gender perspective in all of the Millennium Development Goals.

Latvia as a candidate to the Economic and Social Council in this year's elections attaches great importance to the pivotal role played by the Commission on the Status of Women in ensuring gender mainstreaming in United Nations activities. We welcome the progress towards a unified gender entity, which will strengthen the position of gender equality issues on the agenda of the United Nations and its member states. We also welcome the thematic focus on gender equality at the 2010 Annual ministerial review during the High-level segment of the ECOSOC substantive session.

Mr Chairman,

Gender equality policy in Latvia is focused on the following goals: awareness raising, reducing domestic violence, identifying the impact of lifestyle habits on health and the quality of life, including the large gender disparity in life expectancy, promoting reconciliation of work and private life. Here we include measures to encourage men's participation in family life, starting with paid ten day paternity leave. Latvia has a gender mainstreaming approach in any policy, legislation, planning and decision-making process.

In Latvia women make up 30% of employers, 50% of Supreme Court judges; 34% of rectors of institutions of higher education; 45% of employees in research and development, 72% of tertiary graduates, 19% of members of parliament. Some of the highest posts of state, such as President, Speaker of the Parliament, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and even less 'traditional' posts such as Minister of Defence and Minister of Interior, have been occupied by women.

Therefore Latvia is sharing its experience, with the active participation of our women's NGOs, with other countries, for example, Afghanistan, Iraq and Georgia and encourages women there to become more economically and politically active. In this way we aim to contribute to the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 'On women, peace and security'.

Further efforts are required in Latvia on reduction of gender segregation in the labour market, tackling gender-based wage gaps, and measures to assist women and men in balancing work and family responsibilities. Moreover, the effects of the economic crisis on employment, and demographic forecasts, are important factors in shaping our future policy on ensuring gender equality. In Latvia, women's NGOs are working closely with government to bolster the institutional framework for promoting gender equality. We hope that as we begin on the road to economic recovery, it will be possible to boost funding for actions that improve women's lives.

Mr Chairman,

Political will to implement gender equality measures, and wide public awareness and support for such measures, are key to greater opportunities for women across the globe. Our collective efforts through the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women are crucial for continued progress.

Thank you.