

Introductory Statement by

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Madame Chairperson,
Honourable Members of the Committee

This is a great honour and pleasure to the delegation of the Republic of Estonia to participate in the 39th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. This is the second time that our delegation has the possibility to appear before the Committee. Estonian Government finds it very important that we can continue the constructive dialogue with the Committee that began in 2002 when our delegation was here in New York for the first time with our initial report. We do our best to assist the Committee's consideration of our periodic report to the greatest extent possible.

Let me also congratulate the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for its 25 anniversary and for the important work done so far. We can see that the Committee has been very active in reviewing its working methods in previous years and is working in 2 chambers now. We hope that the today's dialogue with Chamber B will be interesting and inspiring.

Hereby I would like to introduce our report to the Committee and make a short overview of recent developments in Estonia as concerns the questions of gender equality and measures taken to eliminate gender discrimination in our society.

Entering into force of the Gender Equality Act on 1st of May 2004 should be mentioned as one of the most important developments. The lack of relevant legislation was also one of the points of concerns for the Committee when considering our initial report.

The purpose of the Act is to ensure equal treatment for men and women and to promote gender equality as a fundamental human right and a public good in all areas of social life. The act provides for the prohibition on discrimination based on sex in private and public sectors and also the right to claim compensation for damage.

The Act can be qualified as progressive legislation and as a promoting factor for gender mainstreaming since it commits all state and local government agencies to apply gender mainstreaming strategy. It obliges also educational and research institutions and employers to promote equal treatment for men and women.

An independent institution of the Gender Equality Commissioner handling the complaints about gender discrimination was established. The act also stipulates the duties of Ministry of Social Affairs upon implementation of Gender Equality Act. Moreover, an advisory body for the government – Gender Equality Council – is foreseen to be established under the act.

We would also like to emphasise that in addition to the right to compensation provided under Gender Equality Act, as of 1st of July 2004 there is also a regulation under the Penal Code stating the punishment for unlawful restriction of the rights of a person or granting of unlawful preferences to a person on the basis of his or her sex.

Although there is no one single action plan for promoting gender equality, this aspect has been integrated into several specific policy documents, e.g. the Ministry of Social Affairs Strategic Action Plan, Estonian National Development Plan for the Implementation of the EU Structural Funds, the State Budget Strategy, National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, National Employment Action Plans etc.

Several activities have been initiated and carried out to apply the gender mainstreaming strategy. In the first gender mainstreaming project „Gender Impact Assessment as a Core Measure for Gender Mainstreaming”, carried out in 2003 to 2004 with co-financing from the European Union the goal was to improve the understanding of gender equality and the dual-

track approach to achieve equality and to develop specific methods and tools, in particular gender impact assessment, for the promotion of gender mainstreaming in Estonia. Also first manual for Gender Impact Assessment was compiled by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

Gender impact assessment is an instrument and a component of the Gender Mainstreaming concept. Implementation of Gender Equality Act as a regular mechanism requires not only availability of sex-desegregated and gender relevant data, but availability of gender expertise as well.

In order to further prepare for implementation of gender mainstreaming strategy the Phare Twinning Project “Development of Administrative Capacity of National Authorities in the Field of Gender Mainstreaming” was carried out from July 2004 to December 2005 between the German and Estonian authorities. To achieve the goal of promoting gender mainstreaming 17 trainers were trained; trainings were held to transfer basic gender mainstreaming expertise to civil servants and local government officials, providing training to all together 181 officials, and internet-based centre of expertise was created.

In 2006 a gender mainstreaming strategy handbook was published electronically where also CEDAW and Beijing Platform for Action are introduced.

Gender statistics have an essential role in the elimination of stereotypes, in the formulation of policies, in raising awareness, inspiring measures for change and providing unbiased basis for policies and measures.

In addition to a publication of Statistics Estonia “Women and Men”, published at the end of 2006 and presenting both statistical information and thorough analysis, also yearly statistical publications on specific topics (e.g. earnings or labour market) include both statistics and analysis of the situation of men and women. Also, the yearly publication of Ministry of Social Affairs “Social Sector in Figures” includes chapter “Gender equality” and gives statistical data in other fields segregated according to sex.

Information materials have been published and distributed in order to raise public awareness about gender equality. A Russian version of a review “Different, but Equal”, a booklet which was first published in Estonian in cooperation with the UN Population Fund in 2003 and

which briefly and clearly presents the basic terminology and problems related to equality of men and women was published in 2005.

In order to have a better overview of attitudes and opinions women and men carry concerning the situation and position of men and women in a society, Ministry of Social Affairs ordered in 2005 already for the second time a survey "Gender Equality Monitoring". The analysis of the results of the survey has been made available to the public at the homepage of the ministry.

As a Member State of the EU, Estonia is participating in the process of elaboration of indicators for the follow-up of the Beijing PFA. Estonia also participates in the work of Council of Europe in the field of equality between men and women where considerable attention has been paid to gender mainstreaming.

Madame Chairperson, honourable members of the Committee,

I would now like to continue with introducing our national institutions and organizations dealing with gender equality issues.

From 1st of January 2004 the previous Gender Equality Bureau has been operating under the authority of the Deputy Secretary General of Social Affairs as the Gender Equality Department. The Department mainly deals with all matters concerning gender equality, including drafting relevant legislation and policies, raising awareness, coordinating the implementation of gender mainstreaming, cooperating with the academic community in producing research on gender issues. Also the topics of domestic violence and prevention of trafficking in women are dealt with in the Gender Equality Department. The lack of resources and attention was also one point of concern as expressed by the Committee in its concluding observations. The progress made in respect of strengthening relevant unit dealing with gender equality does not mean that this is the end of the work done; of course there remain domains where improvements should follow. It can be said that the most critical point now is a lack of academic experts for using gender expertise in policy-making and in implementation of gender impact analyses.

From the beginning of June 2007, the co-ordination of family policies in Estonia was added to the tasks of the deputy secretary general and also the Gender Equality Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The staff of the department consists at the moment of 7 civil servants, 1 of whom is coordinating the activities of 2007 – Year of Equal Opportunities carried out under the auspices of European Union and 1 family policies related activities.

The work of the gender equality unit is supported by the policy information and analysis departments of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Social Policy Information and Analysis Department is preparing different indicators for measuring the situation of gender equality in Estonia, coordinating the research activities and analysis of the disaggregated data. Also the Labour Policy Information and Analysis Department supports the activities of the gender equality unit.

At the beginning of October 2005 the Gender Equality Commissioner was appointed but the institution as such will still need to be developed in order to guarantee the necessary effectiveness of the work. Pursuant to Gender Equality Act the Commissioner monitors compliance with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act, accepts applications from persons and provides expert opinions, analyzes the effect of laws on the status of men and women in society, makes proposals to Government and to government agencies, as well as to local governments and their agencies, regarding alterations and amendments to legislations, advises and informs Government, government agencies and local government agencies on issues related to implementation of the Gender Equality Act, and shall take measures to promote gender equality.

Additionally, from 2004 everyone has the right of recourse to the Chancellor of Justice in order to have his or her rights protected by filing a petition to request verification whether or not a state agency, local government agency or body, legal person in public law, natural person or legal persons in private law performing public duties adheres to the principles of observance of the fundamental rights and freedoms and to the principles of sound administration. In case a person finds that a natural person or legal person in private law has discriminated against him/her on the basis of sex, he or she has a right of recourse to Chancellor of Justice for the conduct of conciliation procedure. As to the conciliation

procedure possibility, only 1 such application has been lodged until now but this did not concern discrimination based on sex.

Several research-related institutions, e.g. Gender studies group in the University of Tartu, Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre (ENUT), Estonian Open Society Institute etc are working on gender equality issues.

Two national NGOs (*Estonian Women's Associations Round Table* and *Estonian Women's Chain of Cooperation*) were established in 2003 to represent Estonia in the co-operation with European Women's Lobby. Both of the organizations are active in promoting gender equality.

The statute of an advisory body to the Government – the Gender Equality Council was approved by the Government in 2005. The founding and convening of the Council has been delayed, on the one hand due to the excessive workload of the small number of persons who are competent in these issues and, on the other hand, the burden of carrying out the extensive tasks related to servicing the Council that would rest on the already limited staff capacity of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

According to the Ministry of Social Affairs Action Plan, a gender equality information centre will be created as a pilot project to support measures within the European Structural Funds.

Madame Chairperson,

I would like to continue by giving some information about the progress made in the field of fight against trafficking in human beings. Estonia has made serious achievements regarding prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings since 2002.

It is estimated that the scale of trafficking in human beings has diminished in Estonia when comparing with the situation in 1990s and beginning of 2000. This is due to the remarkable improvement in the economical situation of Estonia, there is less unemployment, legal job opportunities are more available. Also police estimates that there is significantly less trafficking in women and prostitution. The positive changes in legislation, such as adding special paragraph into Penal Code to criminalize aiding prostitution, have also helped to improve the work of law enforcement.

For prevention purposes, several awareness rising campaigns have been held, most remarkable of them the Nordic-Baltic Campaign against Trafficking in Women 2002-2003. Red Cross and IOM have had trafficking prevention campaigns targeting young people. Trainings for specialists such as social workers and victim support specialists, teachers, youth workers, police authorities, school psychologists are held several times a year; they are organized by the Ministry of Social Affairs and NGOs. Red Cross receives annually money from state budget and since 2007 their activities include preventing trafficking in human among young people.

For prevention and victim support purposes, hotline was opened in 2004. It is operated by NGO and financed by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

In 2006, national Development Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was adopted by the Government. It sets out the strategic objectives for combating trafficking in human beings and determines the main measures and activities for achieving such goals from 2006 to 2009.

In victims support area, several improvements are made. Estonia participates in the Nordic-Baltic pilot project on safe return and reintegration of women victims of sexual exploitation. The project involves NGOs and governmental institutions and it provides legal, social economic, medical and psychological care, safety and protection for the victims of trafficking and facilitates safe return and integration of victims. Three shelters for female victims were established in 2007.

Estonia also participates in the EU cooperation project under EQUAL programme, titled "Integration of women involved in prostitution including victims of human trafficking into the legal labour market". Social and psychological rehabilitation centre for prostituted/trafficked persons was opened in 2006; a system of support personnel is being developed.

It is also important to mention that in March 2004 Estonia ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. .

As to the future plans, I would like to point out that Estonia continues implementing the National Development Plan 2006-2009. Also, the Nordic-Baltic Pilot project and EQUAL project are implemented 2005-2008.

Madame Chairperson, let me now proceed with the issue of violence against women. Two large-scale quantitative researches have been conducted on prevalence, causes and consequences of domestic violence in Estonia so far (Estonian Open Society Institute 2001, 2003). There have also been analyses made upon police statistics in one of the four police regions (Estonian Open Society Institute 2005). However, the need for further research (both quantitative and qualitative) remains. The cost of violence, changes in people's attitudes, motives of perpetrators and other aspects of violence, still need further studying.

The first shelter for women, who are the victims of domestic violence, was established in Tartu in December 2002. Today Estonia has 3 NGOs that are providing shelter and counselling services for victims of domestic violence - in Tallinn, Tartu and East-Estonia. Additionally some victims find help in shelters for child and mother, but the need for greater number of shelters, which cover more regions of Estonia, remains. In some counties, unfortunately, the possibility to get help is minimal. Similarly, there are currently no services for perpetrators.

NGO Estonian Social Programs Centre conducted a big-scale public campaign "If love hurts" against domestic violence in 2005. The centre has also been running a women's support groups network that is providing counselling for women who have suffered from domestic violence since 2003. Currently there are 5 support groups working on a weekly basis, one group is also for Russian speaking women. In 2005, a pilot support group for violent men was launched.

In 2006-2007, Estonia has been developing a national action plan on domestic violence that will come into force in 2008. The overall aim of the action plan is to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence. The action plan will address different fields of action – prevention (awareness raising, trainings for different target groups), data gathering (research, statistics), legislation, services (for different target groups), co-operation between different institutions. Numerous NGOs and relevant ministries (Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice,

Ministry of Education and Science) were involved in compiling the national action plan and several activities will be put into practice by them.

From the beginning of 2006 in order to protect the personal life of a person or other personality rights, the court may apply a restriction order with a term up to three years under the Code of Civil Procedure. Also, from July 2006 there is a possibility under the Code of Criminal Procedure for a court to forbid temporarily the suspect or the accused to be in places or to approach or communicate with the persons designated by the court. Such a temporary restriction order can be applied only with the consent of the victim.

Madame Chairperson,

Next issue I would like to cover is the participation of women in decision making. Achieving a gender balance there remains a challenging domain for the improvement of the situation of women in Estonia.

The share of women in the parliament has slowly increased over the years but women are still less likely to get elected than men although the situation seems to be improving. The share of women at the local government level has always been slightly higher than in the parliament. The comparison with the previous elections the proportion of women has raised both at the national and local level, and both in terms of candidates and those elected.

It should also be brought out that the new parliament starting its work in April 2007 elected women as the President and one of the Vice-Presidents of the Parliament. In the present government there are three women ministers Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of Population and Ethnic Affairs and Minister of Culture.

The most recent study on women and men in politics is "Research on Governance: women and men politicians' equality", a study which was conducted in 2004 in Estonia as part of the project "Mass Media in (Re)Distribution of Power", supported by the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005). The main finding of the study was that Estonian women do not have equal opportunities with men to reach elected positions. Estonian mass media are one of the central institutions that reinforce gender stereotypes in politics and the society as a whole. The Estonian top women politicians generally feel themselves to be unequal to their male colleagues, but not all of them are ready to oppose the prevailing order.

Under the project competition "Promotion of cooperation among women" organised by the Ministry of Social Affairs from 2003 to 2005 several NGO-s were financed in order to carry out projects aimed at increasing political representation of women. From 2006 some changes were integrated into the money allocating process. First, relevant project competition is now organized in co-operation with Open Estonia Foundation. Second, the circle of addressees has been widened from women's NGO-s to all NGO-s who are interested in promoting gender equality with their activities through specific projects. Also the sum of money has increased due to additional funds from the Open Estonia Foundation.

Taking into account the year 2007 being the year of parliamentary elections, the theme of the projects for 2006 was "More women into politics". The competition aimed at identifying information and training projects that would help to promote debates about the necessity of women in politics that value gender-balanced representation and expand understanding of the roles of women in politics and the issues of gender equality in different policy fields. Nine projects were financed in the framework of the competition, including for example a series of radio programmes, a compilation of articles and interviews "Women Ministers in the Republic of Estonia", a collection "Women in top-level politics", a pre-election debates, a film of interviews with women politicians and officials in Brussels and a project "Changing attitudes" aimed at young students. In addition, seminars, trainings, conferences and roundtables were organized, articles were published and interviews were given to the press.

Madame Chairperson, Honourable members of the Committee,

Due to rapid economic growth there have been positive changes in recent years in the Estonian labour market and the rate of unemployment has decreased considerably. Since 1995 the unemployment rate has been higher among men than women. As the analysis of Statistics Estonia show, during the last few years women have been more active in the labour market than men. Their employment rate has increased faster. For example in 2006 the unemployment rate for women was 5.6 per cent for women and 6.2 per cent for men. During the last years, the labour force shortage has become a problem and mainly women have entered into employment and the greatest number of employed have been elderly women. The reason behind it is the creation of new jobs primarily in the service sector (trade, hotel trade, etc.).

The research "Women-Men on Estonian Labour Market: Evaluation of Wage Differences", was carried out by Political Research Centre Praxis in 2004. The researchers confirm that a large part of wage differences probably arises from people's attitudes, which are expressed in labour market behaviour of employers or upon selection of employees by employers. The change of attitudes is enhanced by increased awareness. The Estonian media has always abundantly covered wage difference issues.

In 2002, Estonia joined the European Union's Community action programme, through which the European Community framework strategy on gender equality (2001-2005) is implemented. One of the projects carried out on the basis of the programme from December 2003 to February 2005 was aimed at supporting women's careers in the private sector. On the basis of the project "Women to the Top", mentor programs were launched in five Estonian private companies, and a publication was translated dealing with organization-theoretical issues from a feminist viewpoint, "It Will Be in Order".

Estonia also participated as an international partner in the project "Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming in the New Member States: a Pilot Project in Hungary", taking place from September 2005 to November 2006 under the European Union's Community action programme. In the framework of the project concept of institutionalization and handbook for leaders containing guidelines, gender equality standards, necessary activities, best practices, indicators and specific measures to be taken for implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy were prepared.

In order to further facilitate the implementation of Gender Equality Act Estonian-French twinning project "Equality between men and women – the principle and aim for efficient and sustainable companies" will be carried out in 2007-2008 with co-financing from the European Union.

The purpose of this project is to raise awareness of the private sector of legal norms, policies, tools and best practices for promoting gender equality in companies. The activities of the project will include a quantitative among private sector employers, elaboration of guidelines and tools for private sector employers for avoiding gender discrimination, promoting gender equality in the company, holding seminars for distribution of practical know-how on promotion of gender equality in the companies and holding roundtables and launching a

network of employers and stakeholders to exchange information, experience and good practice for the advancement of gender equality.

Thirteen development partnerships in the framework of the European Commission's EQUAL initiative have been funded in Estonia. Five of the development partnerships were aimed at improving the situation of women in the labour market. The main activities included training, motivating women to start their own businesses, raising general awareness of society about gender equality, providing information about the possibilities of reconciling work and family life, creating new working-methods and the like.

Information materials have been published and distributed. In addition to the publishing of ILO "ABC of Women Workers' Rights" mentioned before, together with pertinent conventions and a list of recommendations in Estonian with the aim to raise public awareness, also English-Estonian dictionary of equality terminology has been published and the material "Elderly women and employment" compiled which can be used for the training of employment bureaus and representatives of employers.

Regarding the area of reconciling professional and family life, which we consider to be an aspect of utmost importance in the field of gender equality, we would like to point out the following.

The Parental Benefit Act took effect on January 1, 2004. The idea behind the parental benefit scheme was first to compensate the loss of income for the caring family member during the first year of parenthood. The benefit is paid from the state budget. The benefit level is 100% of the parent's previous earnings, but not less than minimum monthly wage per month and not more than three times the average salary. The parents who were not working before are entitled to the benefit in the fixed amount per month. From January 2006 the period of parental benefit was extended for non-working parents 14 months instead of 11 months after the birth of the child.

Among all the persons who received the parental benefit the share of fathers has been around 1%. It is necessary to increase the awareness of both mothers and fathers in order to encourage larger involvement of fathers in child caring and in family matters in general. Another important issue is to change the mentality of employers.

Madame Chairperson,

The problems of HIV/AIDS were among the issues of concern for the Committee during the consideration of our initial report. We have to admit that these issues continue to be problematic to Estonia and the fight against HIV/AIDS poses significant burden on the society. The first AIDS case was diagnosed in 1992. The total number of people diagnosed with AIDS throughout the years is 145. Majority of registered cases are injecting drug users (IDU) and their sexual partners but statistics shows signs that there is a threat to the generalisation of the epidemics.

In order to tackle the HIV/AIDS epidemic new national HIV and AIDS strategy for 2006-2015 has been drawn up in 2005 together with an action plan for 2006-2009. In the situation of growing epidemics it was considered necessary to prepare a strategy that would involve more other governmental organisations, private sector and civil society. The Government also created a high-level multi-sector advisory body to the Government named Governmental HIV and AIDS Committee for the central coordination of the implementation of the new strategy.

In the strategy there are measures being implemented to prevent spread of HIV infection in addition to the general population among persons involved in prostitution, injecting drug users, other vulnerable groups and from mother to child. The support and health care services are provided to people already living with HIV/AIDS. ARV-treatment is free of charge for all those in need, and the case management of HIV-positive people is currently started to implement.

The main challenge in planning and implementing the activities of the strategy is to tackle the epidemic not to break out from the injecting drug users to general population. The management of generalized epidemic needs reorientation of activities to follow a wider approach. In addition they are much costlier than and not as effective as those targeted at specific risk groups.

Thank you for your kind attention! We now do our best to answer all your questions as thoroughly as we can.