



# NORWAY

**Introductory Intervention,  
to the Examination of Norway's 7<sup>th</sup> Report by the CEDAW Committee  
United Nations**

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**STATEMENT**

**By**

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Madam Chairperson, distinguished members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Norwegian government, I am honoured to meet the Committee for a constructive dialogue on Norwegian practises and policies for implementing the CEDAW commitments. My government considers these periodic examinations by treaty bodies to be a crucial part of international monitoring of legally binding conventions and covenants on human rights. Gender Equality is not reached over night. Norway has a long history of social inclusion and equality strivings, the last 30 years standing out as to performance and results. Nevertheless, we still have some distance to walk – and in the meantime, being in process – new challenges emerge, like the needs of immigrant girls and women and the necessity of including men and boys in eradicating all gender based discrimination.

These meetings are also an excellent opportunity for us to receive advice on improving the implementation of the convention. It is certainly a privilege to have so many outstanding experts addressing Norway's gender equality policies. We will bring back home your messages for necessary improvements in our work. The concluding remarks from the Committee will be given wide attention, not only by relevant authorities, but also in the civil society. (I will come back to that later.)

After the examination in 2003 (my first one ), the Committee called Norway a “haven for gender equality”, but expressed concern regarding inequalities in economic decision making, violence against women and the rights/needs of immigrant girls and women. On this background, and also due to the list of issues for this meeting, I will address these themes briefly in my introductory remarks.

I would like, however, first to draw your attention to the following: When the present cabinet took office, the name of my ministry was changed to the “Ministry of Children and Equality”, underlining the importance of equality issues, and in accordance with Committee remarks from 2003.

And secondly, we are pleased that women’s NGO’s and other stakeholders have contributed to the producing of 7<sup>th</sup> report in a constructive way, as also noting the fruitfulness of the making of a “shadow report” from the NGO’s as well as their separate meeting with the Committee.

Since 2003, and the Committee’s concern about the issue of violence against women/violence against the next of kin, a broad spectre of measures has been taken. Not the least the coordination of activities through the cross-sectorial Action Plans against Violence in Close Relations; headed by the Ministry of Justice. New institutions have been set up, programs, projects and research are launched or continued, the Penal Code is strengthened and the Crisis Centres (50) as well as the Centres for incest victims (18) (all NGO’s) now receive 80 % state support. A new Plan of Action against violence is in process, headed by a cross ministerial group of deputy ministers, to be launched soon.

A very important initiative taken, is the appointment by cabinet of a “Committee on aggravated sexual assaults” (2006), that will report on the situation of women who have been subjected to rape or other types of sexual violence, and will identify factors, propose measures and strategies – sometime early next year. Another eye-opener is the study of the Director General of Public Prosecutions, on legally enforceable judgements in rape cases. The study is described in more detail in our answers to the Committee’s list of issues. A working group has given a number of recommendations to strengthen the situation of rape victims. This will be followed up.

We have learned that it is necessary to apply a double or even triple approach to combat violence; to focus on treatment of abusive men, strengthen the support to women and children and also investigate in various prophylactic measures on local levels. There is a strong need for the municipalities to coordinate their work better and to train staff in the different sectors – to take action as early as possible when domestic violence is detected.

Moreover, a cross-ministerial group has been appointed to consider a specific law to secure low threshold, free of charge services, to all women who are victims of violence, building upon the existing crisis centres. The group will also consider what type of services and the quality of those, in reasonable proximity to women's homes. Further, five regional centres of competence are set up to help coordinate, guide and support the local work against violence, corresponding with the National Centre of Research on Violence and Traumatic stress which has a duty to collect, systemize and disseminate knowledge throughout the country.

Forced marriages and FGM are since long forbidden by Norwegian law, regardless of whether it takes place in Norway or abroad, when one of the parties is a Norwegian citizen or has close ties to Norway. The Cabinet launched the new Action Plan against forced marriages in June this year, with 40 some strong measures. 6 ministries and 6 national authorities cooperate. New, considerable funding is well in place, and the challenge is to educate and train staff in schools, kindergartens, social services, crisis centres, youth services, family counselling offices, child welfare services, police and public prosecution in how to prevent and eventually handle cases of forced marriages. Minority groups and relevant NGO's also get funding to work among themselves to change attitudes and behaviour.

No culture, tradition or religion can ever serve as an excuse for this malpractise to prevail.

A new action plan against FGM is in process and will be launched in October this year; based upon more research and scrutiny of former plans, than ever. The methods to prevent run along the same lines as above, but the health sector is of course more involved. We have initiated the first research project on the volume of FGM in Norway; being a very difficult task to measure, but we badly need some more secure data.

Enforcement of these 2 laws is crucial, but we have had few cases before the court so far. However, in 2005 a father and brother were sentenced to up two and a half year imprisonment for forcing their daughter/sister into a marriage.

As to economic empowerment of women, it is puzzling that still so few women in a country like Norway, take part in decision-making in the upper echelons of the economy and the corporate sector, whether it be as top managers or in the board rooms. This has obviously to do with structural and historical dimensions, nevertheless it is a goal to alter the situation. Therefore the former and present cabinet have chosen to take strong affirmative actions as to secure women's rights in corporate sector. You may know that already in 2003 did the Parliament by majority vote for amendments in several company laws, to secure 40 % women and gender balance on boards, proposed by the former cabinet. As the first Parliament world-wide , to do this !

The law governing state owned companies and inter-municipal companies, entered into force in January 2004 (with a two years transition) and the law governing the PLC's (500 large companies) entered into force January 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, with a two years transition. Today the state owned and IMC's are in place, and the PLC's will be measured by jan.2008; today 60 % of them having reached the goal. If you ask these companies today, they will tell that there is no trouble finding competent women at all; compared to their outcry four years ago, that it would be impossible to find competent and "willing" women. It now seems to be recognized that diversity is good for innovation, bottom-lines and company

culture. The arguments of fairness and democracy of course are strong, bearing in mind that the companies involved either have a broad spread of shares (PLC's) or represent the society at large (the state owned companies).

To support the legal reforms, several databases have been set up for women to register in, and also training courses for strategic board work have been arranged for some years, by the Public Investment Fund of Norway. The Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry has, on its own footing, for 4 years run a programme called Female Future, to recruit and train women for positions in corporate sector (it is described in our 7<sup>th</sup> report); a very good practise that shows where political decisions pave the way, private sector will follow up !

After the examination in 2003, the Committee urged Norway to accelerate the eradication of gender based pay discrimination for work of equal value. Since then, we have developed an ICT-based measurement tool to detect pay discrimination within a workplace (or a branch) and in 2006 the cabinet appointed the Equal Pay Commission (experts) that will give their report by March 2008. The Commission has its own web-site and arranges seminars and visits to other countries, as well as communicate with a reference group where all the social partners are represented. We have high expectations to this commission.

There is done considerable new research on reconciliation of work life and family life, on unequal pay and also a new national strategy is developed with focus on the choices for education and jobs done by boys and girls, and how the schools handle the G.E issues. The strategy will be launched in September 2007. Norway has a heavy task to break this cultural and historical segregation, as well as promoting more women to work full day to a larger extent than today (43 % work part-time).

This autumn will see elections for the Municipal and County Councils. A series of initiatives has been taken, to ensure that more women are nominated on the party lists, and on the top! Such nominations are challenging, since they are not regulated by parity laws. Still only one out of six mayors (431) are women; this is not a good score at all. But campaigning seems to work! After a pre-election campaign in 2005, the Saami Parliament has increased the number of women from 18 to 51 % in the 2005 election.

We certainly do have a quota demand in our Local Government Act; when municipal councils appoints political committees, at least 40 % shall be women. This system has improved the numbers of women in political positions, but still almost 1 out of 3 committees fails to comply. The county governors have the task to control, and they have received strong instructions from the ministries to take actions.

Last year the Ministry of Local Government funded a campaign run by the Ombudsmans office , promoting more women on the lists for local elections, and we can already see results, now 42 % of the nominated are women. We do indeed look forward to Sept. the 14<sup>th</sup>.

A goal for the government is social inclusion and integration of all citizens (or citizens to be) of Norway. Everyone is to participate and have equal opportunities regardless of gender, religion, belief, ethnicity, political affiliation, sexual orientation, disability or age.

A range of initiatives has been taken to eliminate the barriers immigrant girls and women meet. These are described in our report and answers to the list of issues, but I would like to mention a few:

Two years ago, a specific Directorate for inclusion and integration was set up, and the new Anti – discrimination Act, forbidding discrimination on grounds of ethnicity and religion, was enforced (CERD incorporated). A White Paper to the Parliament in 2006, dealing with social inclusion, has measures exclusively for

immigrant women. A National Action Plan for integration and inclusion targeting the immigrant population was initiated in 2006 and well funded, one target group being girls and women.

Programmes are set up and networks are being build, to pre-qualify immigrant girls and women for the labour market; as well as the Introduction Programme – focussing on language learning and social studies – mandatory for all refugees and available also to other immigrants.

The nation wide system of Family Counselling Offices has taken up the task of information and dialogue with the women and their families

Quite a score of young immigrant girls are receiving their Masters at our universities; this is a very good trend.

March 8<sup>th</sup> this year, saw a special celebration for immigrant girls and women, with a large conference on labour market themes, hosted by the Directorate of Integration, and visited by the Queen and Crown Princess of Norway, thus giving the immigrant women a strong voice.

I will also briefly mention the new National Machinery for Equality, the Anti-discrimination and Equality Ombud, established January 1<sup>st</sup> last year, being a fusion of 3 former institutions, and handling our anti-discrimination laws. There is also a new Tribunal (or Board of Appeals). The first year has been used to build the new machinery, to set up several dialogue-fora for stakeholders representing all discrimination grounds and to build networks and cooperation with other agencies and NGO's all over the country – being asked from government and parliament to secure equality work also outside Oslo. The complaints are dominated by gender equality issues, and more specific; an increase in pregnancy based discrimination in work life. We also see a slight increase in complaints concerning the other grounds or where it is an intersectional situation, for instance for immigrant women or disabled women. The new machinery is very visible in the media and has taken up issues



concerning women on its own footing; as to promote gender equality. The Ombud runs the Norwegian programme within the European Equal Opportunity year, as well as being partner in national and international gender equality projects. Dialogue meetings with my ministry is held 4 times a year, providing statistics and results from the work. The new machinery will be evaluated next year, as asked for by the parliament, when voting upon the new system and the law.

Furthermore, I will underline that the Norwegian tradition of tri-partism and social dialogue lifting issues of gender equality into the Basic Agreement between the State, Employers and Employees, has been extremely valuable as a political framework for social development. The systematic approach in consultation issues like wage-setting processes, work and family life – and social reforms, has proven successful and will continue. Thus, gender equality is given “legitimate room” within work life partnerships. The equal pay issue is now of the largest concern for the social partners.

#### **A vision.**

Finally, a few words on the present cabinet’s vision for a gender equal society; we call it : “ The need for redistributing work, power and care between the sexes”.

- More women should be able to enter full-time jobs, also in male dominated sectors, as well as men being recruited to the care- and education sector
- More women should be engaged in senior positions and boardrooms in corporate sector – as to redistribute economic power.
- Women and men must share the responsibilities at home. A specific political goal in Norway is equality in parenthood, regardless of gender.

We believe that boys and men play a crucial role in reaching gender equality. We will not succeed in our striving, unless strong alliances are build between the genders. We are now preparing a White Paper on men, male roles and gender equality, to be submitted to the Parliament next spring; the first one of its kind, I believe, in the world. We also finance a chair (professorship) at the University of Oslo within the field of gender equality research, with focus on men and males (for 3 years);we badly need more solid knowledge.

Profound cultural changes have to be made. I reiterate: The redistribution of power, work and care.

Madam Chair, we have planned 3 regional conferences in November this year, co-hosted with the Confederation of Norwegian Municipalities. The main theme is the CEDAW commitments and to spread and discuss the “results” from this examination.

Madam Chair and distinguished members of the Committee,

I thank you for your attention and am looking forward to a constructive dialogue.