



Statement by

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at the

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Mr Chairman,

First of all, allow me to express my thanks and appreciation for the excellent preparation of this 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women and I also thank Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for his opening statement and warmly welcome the introduction of his campaign on combating violence against women.

As foreign minister of Iceland I gave a statement during the general debate of the General Assembly last September, stating that Iceland regards women's empowerment and full participation at all levels as a fundamental issue for the New Millennium. Whether it be in relation to peace and security, health, poverty or climate change, empowerment of women is key to success.

Today's topic is of vital importance for all societies and the global community as a whole. And let me stress before going any further that women's empowerment is the best investment any society can make. We should never speak of spending when it comes to putting government money into gender equality, we should always speak of investing.

To the sceptics and the critics we will always need to present hard facts. I propose this one.

In the beginning of the last century my country - a former colony - was one of the poorest in Europe. We received development aid until 1976. Now, thirty years later Iceland is number one on the UNDP Human Development Index. Research shows that one of the main reasons for this dramatic turn is the liberation of women and their invaluable contribution to our economy, with more than 80% of women active in the labour market. The path towards women's emancipation has meant a lot of hard work for generations, but the advantage for society as a whole is indisputable.

Mr Chairman,

In a globalised world no country can afford not to make women's empowerment a priority. As the traditional divide between domestic policy and foreign policy evaporates before our eyes - the value of making gender-equality a core issue in foreign policy becomes twofold. Everyone needs to take part in shaping the global agenda in order to progress at home. And everyone needs to learn from the valuable experience of others.

Nationally the Government of Iceland concentrates on strengthening capacities of both state and non-state mechanisms that are involved in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Giving relevant bodies the financial and human resources to follow up on implementation is essential, and therefore the theme of our discussion today is particularly relevant. A new gender equality bill currently under discussion in the Icelandic parliament seeks to strengthen the capacity of the monitoring body responsible for Gender Equality - this should improve implementation of measures for mainstreaming and gender equality, both in the private and public sector.

We are all aware of the risk of backlash and backsliding from our goals. Recent research has indicated that young people's attitude towards gender equality has not improved in my country and in some cases worsened. A new project has, therefore, been developed which focuses on raising gender-awareness through education at pre- and grammar school level. The gender equality bill also stresses the need for engaging men in the discourse on gender equality.

One of the most important steps the government of Iceland has taken on equal opportunities is in my view the legislation on parental leave. During the five years since its implementation, it has been a great success. Up to 90% of fathers have used their rights, fully or partly. The parental leave is a powerful tool in sharing responsibilities between women and men. It is an expensive system but we regard it as an investment for the future.

Mr Chairman

Globally, the importance of sufficient financing for gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be overstated. This has been highlighted on a number of occasions, including at the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey. However, practice remains weak.

This CSW shows that, while progress has been made, too much remains to be done to be complacent. It is crucial that gender transcends discussions into action, and for this to happen, mainstreaming needs to be subjected to renewed efforts and become integrated and indispensable to all forms of programming, i.e. legislation, budgeting, curricula, health strategies etc., etc.

Today in view of the discussion around climate change, one has to be concerned and alert as to the possible if not probable feminization of Climate Change.

There is then a direct connection between women's vulnerability and the vulnerability of the Small Island Development States (SIDSs), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Least Developed Countries (LLDCs) as the latter are most exposed to the impact of climate change.

Iceland's international development co-operation has a clear focus on women's empowerment seeking to support the strengthening of participation in societies. In general, gender perspectives are incorporated in all Iceland's bilateral development cooperation programmes and projects. The focus has been on the poorest of the poor, illiterate women with little or no possibility of pursuing their rights. Work in the field of basic health care focusing on reproductive health also contributes to the empowerment of women.

Iceland regards UNIFEM as a key partner in our development cooperation, and we have been actively supporting the Fund's work, both by increasing considerably our core contributions as well as by supporting its regional work in the Caribbean, Afghanistan, The Balkans and various places in Africa. We also support the UNFPA and its major

global role in promoting the importance of women's reproductive health and rights. Their campaign to end fistula is to be commended.

Mr Chairman,

The United Nations is a key player in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. The organization should be commended for the progress already made in gender mainstreaming and gender specific programmes. However Iceland believes that more can be done and that the UN system needs to be more responsive, coherent and accountable in this field.

Iceland will this year complete her 4 year terms on the CSW but will stay engaged on the very issue of gender equality and women empowerment in ECOSOC, at the UNGA and at other for such as the Peace Building Commission and through other networks as well as in the Security Council.

Iceland is now campaigning for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period of 2009-2010 at the elections to take place during the 63rd General Assembly. This brings me to Security Council resolution 1325 and the need to ensure women's participation at the negotiating table. Iceland regards the equal participation of women in peace processes as fundamental for achieving, maintaining and promoting sustainable peace. Determined to put our own house in order, the Icelandic government is instituting a Plan of Action on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325, which will be published and shared with all of you in the course of the coming weeks.

I have personally raised the importance of women in peace processes in my bilateral meetings since I became foreign minister. In particular, I have supported the work of the International Women's Commission for a Just and Sustainable Palestinian-Israeli Peace or IWC and encouraged others to do the same. Women should not be marginal to difficult peace negotiations; they should be brought directly into the process.

Finally Mr. Chairman, let us be reminded that in just three years time we will celebrate the anniversary of the International Women's Day – launched on the 8th of March 1911 in Copenhagen, Denmark, by Clara Zetkin, leader of the Women's Office for the Social Democratic Party in Germany.

The need for a global agenda is no less important now than it was in 1911.

The draft conclusion of this 52nd session of the CSW contains bold ideas and provides us with a valuable road-map which we all should support and take back home for our governments to apply.

Thank you Mr. Chairman