

**Address by Ms Elżbieta Radziszewska, Government Plenipotentiary for  
Equal Treatment at the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of  
Women**

**New York, 22 February – 4 March 2011**

**Ms Chairperson,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am honoured to represent Poland as the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment. I am convinced that ensuring full access for girls and women to education, training, science, and technology is a precondition for progress and sustained development.

I am particularly glad that the UN Commission for the Status of Women took up the subject of their participation in science and technologies in 2011. It is precisely the year 2011 that has been named the year of Maria Skłodowska-Curie, an outstanding Polish scientist, the discoverer of radium and polonium and a Nobel Prize laureate. I am convinced that, thanks to the planned celebrations, the figure of this outstanding Polish woman and her scientific accomplishments will become an inspiration for girls and women all over the world.

Poland treats the subject of access of women and men to education and technology as a priority. In it, we see one of the essential conditions for development and innovation. School duty, both for girls and boys was introduced in Poland already in 1918 – immediately after the regaining of independence. Girls and boys in Poland have the duty to continue their education until the age of 18. Polish law guarantees equal treatment with regard of sex, among other things in education and employment. In 2010, Poland fully implemented of all the EU directives regarding an equal treatment with regard of sex. The aim of an equal treatment of women and men was reflected in the new school programme, in all its educational stages, starting with preschool education.

Still several years ago about 50 percent of pupils from each year group studied in schools where education ended with secondary school graduation exams. Today having left from junior high schools, 80 percent of male and female pupils pick the above - mentioned schools. Government activity concentrates on the introduction of modern teaching methods, propagation of preschool education and lowering the school age. We also act in favour of improving school infrastructure and the financial situation of teachers. Male and female teachers' salaries in 2010 went up by 30 percent as compared with 2007. Thanks to fighting stereotypes and cultural patterns disadvantageous for women, women now prevail among the graduates of secondary and higher schools in Poland. More and more women chose technical faculties earlier dominated by

men. Currently, more than 50 percent of women aged 19-24 are students. During a dozen or so years, the number of students in Poland rose five-fold. To meet the new challenges, the government has been implementing an educational reform. A draft of amendment of the Law on higher education was adopted in 2010 introducing an up-to-date model of functioning of Polish institutions of higher learning. The new law envisages, among other things, the simplification of the scientific career path for women and men and closer links between the academic world and the labour market.

These actions are accompanied by numerous educational-information campaigns encouraging women to pick technical faculties and leading roles as well as their full access to the labour market. This happens also through the dissemination of solutions in favour of reconciling professional life with the family life. These projects, among others, include *Gender Index*, *Socio-economic activation of women on local and regional level*, *I am the She-Boss*, or *Girls to technical universities*. The last project encourages female high school students to take up engineering studies, especially in strictly technical faculties – the best future-oriented, lucrative and open to the international labour market. In 2010, as the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment I started to implement the project called *Equal Treatment – Standard of Good Management* aimed at elaborating a cohesive and effective system of counteracting discrimination on all administrative levels and promoting the establishment of a network of Coordinators for Equal Treatment.

I am convinced that in order to ensure full access for girls and women to education and the labour market it is necessary to consolidate international partnership and synergy among institutions, governments of member countries, social partners and the civic society all over the world. The only way to achieve equality is to act together. I believe that this meeting is a step forward on that road. Thank you for your attention.