



# PORTUGAL

**Permanent Mission of Portugal  
to the United Nations**

**Statement by  
H.E. the Secretary of State for Equality  
Ms. Elza Pais**

**At the  
55<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission of the Status of Women**

**New York, 24 February 2011**

**(Check against delivery)**





Mr. Chairperson  
Distinguished delegates

Portugal aligns itself obviously with the intervention made by Hungary on behalf of the European Union. I would however add a few remarks from a national perspective.

Portugal welcomes the organization of this 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the creation of the new United Nations entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UN-Women. I wish the best of successes for the work of Ms. M. Bachelet.

The challenges we face today in the affirmation of gender equality are immense. The creation of this new entity is an incentive to overcome all the obstacles that persist in the assertion of a more egalitarian society.

It is essential to keep the agenda of women's rights and gender equality in the various commitments and objectives established and agreed internationally.

The countries which have a firm commitment with gender equality are countries that believe in a true the development and in using all available human resources.

Global recognition of women as subjects of rights was a fundamental step for the development of the democratic political system. In this sense, the political commitment of Portugal towards equality is strong.

Our governance agenda for equality and non-discrimination has undergone significant progress over the past five years, particularly in the legislative framework.

A law for the decriminalization of voluntary abortion in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy has been adopted in 2007.

The Parity Act was also adopted in 2006 and stipulates that the lists of candidates for local, legislative and European Parliament elections should be composed so as to ensure a minimum representation of 33% of each sex in eligible positions.

With this Act the political representation of women in my country has increased on average by 10% and we now have a more equal and qualified democracy.

The current government has the greatest number of women ministers in our history: we have 5 women in a government of 16 ministries.



We have a law on parental licenses in the framework of our Labour Code that strongly promotes the use of postnatal licenses by men.

I would also highlight the Law against Domestic Violence which is an innovative law with the unique potential in terms of victim protection, training of professionals and conviction of perpetrators. I would like to underline the fact that domestic violence is a major obstacle to achieving gender equality.

A law allowing same sex marriage was approved last year. This is in our view a humanist law that fights the suffering of individuals. More recently the Parliament passed a law on gender identity that allows transgender persons to change their name and sex in the civil registry.

Despite this strong legal framework many barriers still persist. The challenge remains in the transition from *de jure* to *de facto* equality, one of the central challenges of this new stage of public policy in Portugal.

Since the late nineties public policies to promote gender equality have been structured around national action plans. Currently Portugal is implementing 6 gender related national Action Plans and Programs:

1. The National Plan for Equality
2. The National Plan against Domestic Violence
3. The National Plan against Human Trafficking
4. The National Action Plan for the implementation of 1325 Security Council of the UN that represents an important step in the fight against impunity
5. The National Program of Action for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation
6. The 5 Year Strategic Plan for Cooperation on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment within the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries.

These new national plans affirm the values of equality, citizenship and non-discrimination by having at the core the promotion of citizenship, gender equality and new social gender relations.

Clearly, this promotes on the one hand the internalization of new masculinities by young boys and men in general, fostering a shared exercise of power and increasing their participation in the private spheres of life, especially in the care of family members and household tasks. And on the other hand the empowerment of girls and women through a greater independence and increase of their participation in the public sphere, from politics to economics.

More women in politics and in business mean more competitiveness and policies that are close to the needs of people.

Women represent 60% of university graduates in Portugal. They are 40% of research staff. And they are already one third of the owners of small and medium businesses.

However, unemployment continues to affect more women than men. That is why we must all work together to show that women must be involved as part of the solution to overcome the economic and financial crisis we are experiencing.

Now is the time to change the paradigm and to create a new civilization. A civilization that uses all of its human resources; that ensures a redistribution of wealth to reduce the gap between the small percentages of very rich people and the large percentage of very poor ones; that ensures a new relationship between people and the environment; that strongly supports social economy, the associations and solidarity; that commits to Equality, Education and Research as long-term investments, for a sustainable development and social cohesion. Finally, a civilization helps build a better world.

Portugal will therefore continue to implement its political strategy in what regards a developed society, where women and men, whatever their ethnic origin, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion, can fulfill their personal, family and career aspirations on an equal stand.

This balance and commitment is what we deem necessary to build a just and equal society.

Thank you very much.

Elza Pais  
Secretary of State for Equality of Portugal

