



Statement by
H. E. Mr. URMAS PAET,
the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Estonia,
at the 57th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women
5 March, 2013, New York

Mr. Chair, Excellencies, distinguished members of delegations and the civil society,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Estonia aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and would like to offer some additional remarks in our national capacity.

Allow me to say that as a firm supporter of a rights-based approach, Estonia values highly the annual discussions at the Commission on the Status of Women. Women's rights continue to be one of Estonia's human rights priorities. Evidence shows that focussed attention on gender equality in the world during the past 60 years, both at the national and international levels, really has highlighted the shamefulness of violence against women. And yet, in 2013, gender inequality continues to be a phenomenon that cuts across boundaries of wealth, race, and culture. Estonia remains committed to the principle of equality between women and men as a fundamental human right, the principle that has its roots in the first Estonian constitution written in 1920.

Within the next two years we will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of two **landmark declarations**. The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, which is an agenda for women's empowerment, and the Cairo Programme of Action on population and development, are a solid basis for promoting gender equality, women's rights and family planning. Estonia firmly stands for the principles enshrined therein. Also, it is more than 12 years since we adopted the Security Council resolution 1325 on

“Women, Peace and Security” to acknowledge the disproportionate effect of war and conflicts on women and children. It is time to analyze our achievements.

Mr. Chair,

Allow me to illustrate with a few words where Estonia stands in this context. More can be done in all countries, even in those that have been comparatively successful, like my own, in addressing this question.

Only constant attention to problems will guarantee sustainable results. Let me assure you that the Estonian Government is **committed to combating gender-based violence**. It is pertinent to have a good **strategic framework** in place. In Estonia we have the comprehensive **Development Plan for Reducing Violence (2010–2014)**, which lays out concrete activities how to reduce and prevent violence in its various forms, including domestic violence, violence against minors, trafficking in human beings, and violence against women and children. On the justice system side we have the **Guidelines for Development of Criminal Policy until 2018**, which provide that Estonia must have a sufficient number of shelters for victims of criminal offences, including victims of domestic violence and trafficking. In addition, Estonia has a **National Action Plan for the implementation of the Security Council resolution 1325** with the goal of defining and systematizing our activities in the field of international peace missions and development cooperation.

Mr. Chairman,

Tackling gender-based violence requires much more than strategies; it requires a range of **interlinked activities**.

First of all, it requires powerful and consistent **prevention activities** among the general population, NGOs and other stakeholders. The role of men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls cannot be overestimated. Awareness raising campaigns and education are pertinent to break gender stereotypes, empower women and girls to report incidents and use available services. It is still a reality that attitudes in society too often favour women’s economic dependence on men. In today’s afternoon panel on prevention the Estonian panellist will present concrete examples of primary prevention.

Secondly, what is needed is **support services** for victims. We believe we have a good system for **victim support** in Estonia, both for victims of domestic violence as well as for victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation. The **shelter system** started only in the early 2000s practically from scratch with very limited resources. Today there are ten specialised women's shelters in Estonia, operated by NGOs, which provide temporary shelter for women – with or without children – who are the victims of domestic and gender based violence. Two other special centres provide counselling and shelter for victims of trafficking. Additionally, phone hotlines are operating daily.

Third, a key factor to success is enhanced **co-operation** between all stakeholders – professionals and institutions, civil society and the government. As Estonia is a very small country, co-operation is a multiplying power; we have a very active NGO network in Estonia, working closely with the state. It is important to ensure that the people working with victims are well trained, capable of detecting, preventing and dealing with the complex issue of domestic violence.

Of course, this support system is like a living organism and needs constant grooming. Even though remarkable progress has been made, we are still working on access to services, standardized services, cooperation, and proactive outreach. We are working constantly towards improving the quality of services, raising public awareness, carrying out and mapping studies and analysis. In our fight against violence we have different international cooperation partners.

Mr. Chairman,

We still have a long way to go on the road towards a completely inclusive world where women and men are truly equal. The problem of gender equality has to be addressed at all levels – international, regional, and national. Gender mainstreaming remains a basis for combating violence against women, but this is only a starting point. The actual roots of the problem are social and economic, as well as cultural. Thus, combating violence against women and achieving gender equality cannot be regarded as separate from promoting human rights and social justice in general.

Thank you for your attention.

