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Advancement of Women**

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Mr. Chairman,

Women and girls are still regarded as second rate citizens in too many parts of the world. This despite decades of conferences, conventions and UN resolutions addressing the issue. Conservative and archaic attitudes, often with cultural and religious connotations, leave women and girls at the margins of society. This is the root cause of the problem we are here to discuss.

These deeply rooted impediments deprive women and girls of their human rights - to health, to education, to formal ownership of land, inheritance and other economic assets. As a result women are made vulnerable, exposed to violence and abuse. While this lack of gender equality leaves half the world's population at risk, the price is paid by us all - not only from a moral and ethical perspective, but also in real economic and development terms.

One glance at the Human Development Report says it clearly: there is a strong correlation between the level of gender equality in our countries, and the growth and prosperity of our countries.

Gender equality and women's empowerment lead to human development - it is not merely a product of development.

Thus, our appeal to all political leaders is clear; put fairness, social justice and gender equality first - and our countries will prosper.

(Check against delivery)



This is the broad perspective. And herein lie the challenges.

Two indicators are particularly telling when it comes to women's position in the world: School enrolment rates, and demographics.

- Fewer girls than boys go to school.
- Fewer girls live up at all.

100 million girls and women are just missing. They die because they are not wanted or not fed or not given the care they need. In addition there is violence and death during pregnancy and childbirth.

All this happens because girls and women are not regarded as highly as boys and men, by boys and men.

This is the situation in too many parts of the world and, unfortunately, it is not only inhumane and unjust, but it undermines the potential of these countries and societies.

Empowering women, ensuring equal opportunity, health care and increasing the ratio of women in economic activity makes sense on many levels.

It is not only the right thing to do from a human and ethical perspective. It makes sense from a hard core macro-economic policy point of view. Empowering women gives competitive advantage. Improving women's educational opportunity gives competitive advantage. The countries that recognize this and adjust policies are going to prosper more than others.

But, while many of us here have good legislation and gender-sensitive policies in place, the results are often lacking. The entrenched attitudes of men and their networks are a serious impediment.

We have often dealt with these issues at the United Nations. We have for example greatly increased and improved the rules, norms and official attitudes towards sexually based violence. The recent Security Council decisions - such as 1882, 1888 and 1889, building on 1325 and 1820 - are important parts of this new awakening.

Let us also focus on those who suffer quietly and alone, unattended and forgotten. Those who die when they should have given life. In childbirth and during pregnancy. The half million women, often young mothers, who die from bleeding or complications. Basic health service would have protected them against it.

In Millennium Development Goal No 5 we promised to reduce maternal mortality. This pledge is under-funded and under-supported, and this shameful condition must be changed.

This week, the Government of Norway will present its budget for 2010. With this budget we will sustain and continue our development assistance at 1 per cent of GNI. We will uphold our commitment to the Millennium Development Goals No 4 and 5, as part of our increased efforts in health which has tripled since the year 2000. Policies to advance women make up one third of our bilateral aid.

Let me now comment briefly on the four reports we have before us.

Both with regards to violence against women in general and women migrant workers in particular, we must pursue a number of strategies at the same time. The victims must be given adequate protection, medical care, legal advice and relevant support services.

Perpetrators of violence against women and girls must be held accountable and brought before courts of justice. Nobody should be able to hide behind a shelter of impunity. We must strengthen our endeavours to change attitudes, especially amongst men, and fight stereotypical perceptions that perpetuate inequalities between men and women. Boys and men must be engaged. The expression of masculinity must be challenged. Laws and norms that provide for gender equality must be accompanied by a change of mind-set and behaviour.

More than half of the world's population live in rural areas, an overwhelming majority of them are poor. Statistics clearly demonstrate that poor rural women are particularly vulnerable. Compared to men, they have less access to credit and financial resources.

The marginalisation and discrimination of rural women is a strong impediment to development. We know that investment in girls and women to promote equality with men has a positive effect on productivity, sustainable economic growth and eradication of poverty.

Mr. Chairman,

Norway welcomes the Report of the Secretary General on measures taken and progress achieved in the follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. It gives a very comprehensive overview of steps taken by intergovernmental bodies to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. But still there is a big gap between good intentions and results on the ground.

“Mainstreaming of gender issues” is a chain of words that we must make accessible to non-experts. This is important from a communications point of view. We must be understood.

Mainstreaming means that the girl child must be given special protection and attention, since being born as a girl itself is a handicap.

Mainstreaming means that boys must be sensitized to gender equality issues at an early stage of life to prevent cementing attitudes and behaviour that discriminate against girls and women.

Mr. Chairman,

The past few years have seen encouraging progress in many fields of gender equality, most recently in the international community's resolve to address violence against women, including sexual violence in armed conflict. We also commend the Secretary General's Global UNite campaign, which obviously has inspired women and men in all corners of the world and led to significant increase in the demand for support.

As we heard this morning, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, which UNIFEM manages on behalf of the UN system, received an incredible 900 million USD in requests this year. But, as we also heard this morning, the Trust Fund's available resources is a mere 12 million USD. This is a stark reminder and reality-check: Few of us are willing to follow up our words with sufficient funds.

Norway therefore greatly appreciates the recent decision by the General Assembly, in resolution 63/311, to establish a composite gender entity in the UN system. We expect the entity to contribute greatly to the advancement of women and the promotion of gender equality. As the entity will combine normative work and operational activities, we believe the new entity - headed by a Undersecretary-General with the appropriate mandate and resources to match - will make a big difference to women and men, boys and girls around the world. We therefore expect to see the entity up and running by next summer.

Thank you.

