

Committee on the Elimination of  
Discrimination against Women  
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Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties  
under Article 18 of the Convention  
Seventh periodic report of Finland

## Opening Statement by the Delegation of Finland

Geneva, 20 February 2014



MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

It is a great pleasure for our delegation to continue the perpetual constructive dialogue with your Committee. It is important for our delegation to hear your Committee's views on how to further improve and constantly advance the realization of our common objectives and goals embodied in the Convention. The delegation is certain that this occasion forms a fruitful learning process for all of us.

The delegation of Finland participating in this review includes representatives of six ministries and of the Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva as well as a member of the Parliament of Finland. The Constitutional Law Committee of Parliament has expressed its wish to be present when the UN treaty monitoring bodies review the Government's periodic reports and the participation of the Committee in the official delegation of Finland is an institution.

The promotion of human rights is at a dynamic stage in Finland. The individual and collective rights will be protected through several new legislative projects. An independent external evaluation is currently being carried out on the implementation of the Government's first Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights and the report thereto will be submitted to Parliament this year. A Network of Contact Persons for Fundamental and Human Rights, having representatives from all ministries and appointed to monitor the implementation of the National Action Plan, enhances the follow-up to the concluding observations issued by treaty monitoring bodies within the respective ministries.

The Government carries out reforms in municipalities across the country. The aim is to create a thriving local government structure built on economically robust municipalities. By reorganising local government structures, it will be possible to create a service structure where the power and responsibility for organising services is allocated to a local authority equipped with a sufficiently large population and skills base. In the context of the ongoing major reform of local government, the social and health care system and its funding will be reformed. The aim of the reform is to ensure equal access to and to better integrate social and health services.

After Finland submitted its seventh periodic report, there have been a number of national measures both in implementing and in monitoring human rights. I shall now briefly describe these steps.

### Ratifications of international human rights instruments

As regards the recent ratification of human rights instruments, the Government has ratified the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights entering into force in April.

The measures required for ratifying the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) have been analysed with a view to completing its ratification this year.

The intention is to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol during the term of office of the present Government. An interdepartmental working group submitted its report, including a draft for a Government Bill for ratification, in December.

### Reform of non-discrimination legislation

One of the most important ongoing law projects is the reform relating to the non-discrimination legislation.

The Government Bill is currently being finalized on the basis of the comments received. The idea is that the Gender Equality Act would retain its independent status, a new Ombudsman for Equal Treatment would replace the Ombudsman for Minorities, the Discrimination Tribunal and the Equality Board would be merged, and the Ombudsman for Equality would continue to monitor the observance of the Gender Equality Act.

The drafters have taken into account the need to better address multiple discrimination. The idea is that although the Gender Equality Act would remain a separate statute after the reform, the non-discrimination legislation would enable more efficient intervention in multiple discrimination in cases where gender, in addition to another ground prohibited in the Non-Discrimination Act, is one of the discrimination grounds.

The Government intends to submit the proposal to Parliament this spring.

### Reform of gender equality legislation

The Government is drafting amendments to the Gender Equality Act.

Firstly, some amendments are aimed to improve the protection of gender minorities against discrimination, and promote gender equality. The purpose is to expand the current prohibitions of gender discrimination to also apply to discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression.

Secondly, the Government proposes that the obligation to prepare gender equality plans be extended also to comprehensive schools.

Thirdly, the Government proposes that the provisions on equality planning at workplaces be revised. The content of pay surveys under gender equality plans should be defined more precisely, in order to ensure that women and men working for the same employer get equal pay for equal work and work for equal value.

The purpose is to submit the related Government Bill to Parliament together with the proposed amendments of the Non-Discrimination Act.

### Action Plan for Gender Equality

The Government's Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2012 to 2015 is an established key instrument for implementing the Government's gender equality policy. The working group for monitoring its implementation submitted an interim progress report to Parliament in November 2013. The Action Plan is coordinated by the Gender Equality Unit of the Ministry for Social Affairs and Health. The Unit also coordinates, implements and monitors gender equality policy.

Examples of successful measures under the plan include the progress made by the ministries' working groups on operational gender equality. For example, legislation on family leaves is being amended towards more gender equality, and fathers have already now stronger rights to paternity leave than before. Gender equality in economic decision-making will be increased by means of a project funded from the EU Progress programme.

### Gender mainstreaming

The Government is committed to promoting gender equality in all its decision-making and especially when drafting legislation and preparing the budget as well as in other activities with major implications for gender equality. The aim is to incorporate gender equality perspective into all policies at all levels and stages. Last year a specifically tailored training for gender impact assessment in law drafting was carried out in all ministries.

The Gender Mainstreaming Programme Valtava (for years 2008 to 2014) is a national programme to further gender equality in labour market. Its goals are to support the promotion and mainstreaming of gender equality, produce new methods for the mainstreaming and increase gender equality awareness and expertise among project operators and authorities as well as back up women's entrepreneurship and innovation potential. The programme consists of State and regional level projects. The final report will be published towards the end of this year.

## Violence against women

The Government is seeking means to prevent intimate partner and domestic violence in cooperation with the different branches of administration, in order to reduce human suffering and the costs of such violence caused to the victims, employers and local authorities. A central approach is to develop the services available to victims of intimate partner violence and domestic violence. An interministerial working group coordinates the prevention and monitors the trends of violence as well as draws attention to it.

As to the further implementation of the Action Plan to Reduce Violence against Women, the know-how of municipal officials will be reinforced by continuing training already arranged, and by training more trainers. The purpose is, among other things, to encourage social welfare and health care personnel to broach intimate and domestic violence with their clients, and to improve the personnel's skills to recognise such violence and intervene proactively. Also some universities and polytechnics have included material on the recognition of this violence in their teaching material. The general intention is to include training in all educational lines leading to vocational qualification. The implementation of the Action Plan will be evaluated next year.

A Government Bill to tighten the punishments stipulated for sexual offences was submitted last month. The sentencing practice is expected to become stricter after the reform. The scope of applying the provision of the Criminal Code on rape would be expanded. The act currently punishable as coercion into sexual intercourse would be designated as rape in the Criminal Code. The scope of aggravated rape would be expanded to the effect of defining all rapes of persons under 18 years punishable as aggravated rape.

A new provision on sexual harassment would be introduced in the Criminal Code. At the same time, with the exception of sexual harassment, all sexual offences against adults would be made subject to public prosecution.

In January this year, the Government started the EU-funded two-year project entitled *Right to choose – End to sexual violence and harassment!* It is carried out jointly with non-governmental organisations and the national Police University College. The project will study sexual harassment experienced by women and girls. The video films and supplementary material for the project can also be used at schools and in other related contexts when discussing sexual violence and harassment. The material is also addressed to the perpetrators in order to raise their awareness of the victims' sufferings.

Infanticide and family killings have aroused a discussion in Finland. A working group set up by the Ministry of the Interior to improve the exchange of information in the cooperation between different authorities completed its work at the end of 2013. Proposals were made, for instance, to create new administrative structures and better procedures.

In December 2013 the Ministry of the Interior and the National Police Board concluded an agreement on the activities of the National Police Board for the years 2014 to 2018. The agreement includes seven strategic long term policy definitions for directing the work of the police. One of the key priorities is combating violence. One of the means is preventive activity, paying special attention to domestic violence, violence between spouses or partners, and sexual violence.

Currently, the services of shelters for battered family members are produced by local authorities and private organisations. In November 2013 the Government decided to assume the responsibility for funding the shelters as from the beginning of 2015.

A separate project on shelters is going on in parallel with the law drafting. The project consists of planning the placement of the providers of shelter services across the country. The challenges in sparsely populated areas, accessibility and the needs of special groups can be taken into account in shelter services. The new service system is planned to cover units for addressing intimate partner violence and domestic violence, including shelters, so that shelter services will be available, regardless of place of residence, to all in need.

In 2013 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health studied intimate partner violence and domestic violence directed against Roma women. The primary aims of this unique study were to chart the special features of such violence and recommend measures by which different support services could improve the prevention of violence and address its consequences. The material of the study consisted of interviews with Roma women and specialists in addressing intimate and domestic violence. The study showed that various reasons prevent Roma women from seeking help, and that many of these reasons cannot be identified without knowing the special features of Roma culture. The information produced in the study will be utilised for example when preparing training material on the identification of intimate and domestic violence.

#### Promoting gender equality and reducing segregation in education and research

The Government is carrying out comprehensive reforms in the field of education and research. Examples of these are the reform of the national core curricula for basic compulsory education and the reform of the Act on early childhood education. Both reforms include objectives and measures to advance gender equality.

The core curricula for basic education are being prepared. The new core curricula will be introduced in all grades of basic education in August 2016. In the reform of the core curricula for basic education, the current gender neutral approach will be abandoned and the intention is to change over to gender-aware instruction. In April 2013 the Ministry of Education and Culture instructed that subject-specific curricula texts for all subject groups in basic education should deal with the promotion of gender equality.

The said Ministry and the National Board of Education follow the equality planning in educational institutions and their promotion of equality in general. Gender equality has been included in the continuing training of educational staff, for instance by means of a separate training programme on gender equality and non-discrimination in basic education.

As part of the steering of the higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education and Culture requires the institutions to provide operational reports on their gender equality work. In the reports to be submitted this year, universities will report also on the state of women's and gender studies.

A comprehensive multiannual research project on gender equality in education is being launched.

#### Employment

The employment rate of women is high. The percentage of women among unemployed job-seekers has remained rather unchanged. The unemployment rate is slightly lower among women than men. Most female employees work full time but female employees work part-time clearly more often than men. Part-time work is usual in female-dominated sectors, such as retail trade, and health and social services.

Most women are employed more often permanently than temporarily. However, women are also employed temporarily more often than men. The legislation on fixed-term employment relationships was amended in 2013 by obligating the employer more clearly to give the employee a written account of the central terms of the employment relationship

The aim of the national Equal Pay Programme is to narrow the gender-based pay gap to the maximum level of 15 per cent by 2015. According to information covering last year, the pay gap between the genders was 17 per cent in the whole labour market. Thus, Finland is approaching the target level, but the pace of narrowing the gap is still slow.

The Government has taken many measures for the reconciliation of work and family life. In autumn 2013, the Government proposed that the child home care support should be divided half-and-half between the parents. The purpose is to improve the employment of women, shorten their career interruptions, boost their career and pay development, and advance the realisation of gender equality in the labour market and in family life.

An Act creating a new flexible care allowance – paid to parents of a child under three years of age – took effect at the beginning of this year. This amendment is intended to boost the incentive to work. The flexible care allowance facilitates reconciliation between work and family life, shortens full-time absence from work, and encourages both parents to share the responsibility for child care.

The Ministry of Employment and the Economy has set up a working group to study and evaluate how the current legislation safeguards the rights of parents returning to work after family leave. The working group will draft necessary legislative amendments and submit its report by the end of April this year.

#### National Minorities - Roma Women

The National Policy on Roma has clearly increased awareness and coordination of Roma issues at national level. Also the Roma community supports the implementation of the Policy. Local authorities and Roma organisations themselves have proposed that Roma contact persons should be designated in all municipalities. The educational sector has made a breakthrough. A study indicates that Roma children have made considerable progress in school performance. No remarkable difference is visible between the genders in completing basic education and starting further studies.

Last month, the Criminal Sanctions Agency published a study on female Roma prisoners, their situation in life, and their needs for services. This study – the first of its kind – was conducted jointly with Roma organisations and relevant authorities. It was based on interviews with female Roma prisoners in three women's prisons. The study showed that during imprisonment, the contact of Roma women with their culture and relatives may be interrupted. The study recommends that prisons should have contact persons of Roma origin and that Roma women should have peer support groups of their own.

#### Indigenous peoples – Sámi Women

In 2013 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health commissioned a study on the health and well-being of Sámi living in the Sámi Homeland. A central factor for the well-being of Sámi is based on their independent living, assistance from relatives and the community, and support and services from society. A positive finding is that both the Sámi identity and the Sámi language and culture have gained more strength. Still, the Sámi population lives in the middle of pressures for change, as the population ages, young Sámi move to live elsewhere, ways of life and livelihoods change, and the Sámi community disintegrates. Because of the changes, public services provided in the Sámi language have an important role in ensuring the well-being of Sámi people.

The study indicates that, in general, Sámi people are clearly less satisfied with the available services than the average in Finland, and their access to services is clearly lower. The availability of services varies largely between municipalities, and the situation is worst in outlying villages. The earmarked state subsidy granted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the municipalities in the Sámi Homeland is vital for improving the availability of services in all three Sámi languages.

### Immigrant women

The Government's integration policy for 2012 to 2015 specifically focuses on ways of improving the employment rate of immigrants, promoting integration training and improving the status of immigrants in vulnerable situations.

The Government set the objectives to reduce health differences between population groups, and to strengthen the basis for well-being. The programme focuses particularly on immigrant women, who risk exclusion from services, and to elderly immigrants. A cross-administrative working group monitors the implementation of the programme.

During the current year, a centre for the integration of immigrants will start operating under the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. It will support local actors in their integration work, also taking account of the influence of a person's gender in his or her integration. The centre will also be responsible for establishing a monitoring mechanism for the integration of immigrants, related measures and ethnic relations.

A project to evaluate and improve integration training - entitled Participative Integration- was completed at the end of 2013. One of the integration paths under the project focused on immigrants in a vulnerable situation or otherwise in need of special support. The possible needs for structural adjustments, legislation and resources will be assessed. In addition, the intention is to build up know-how and to spread best practices.

### Women, peace and security

In Finland's foreign policy special attention is devoted to the participation of women in the power structures and the elimination of violence against women. Through the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and related resolutions, Finland is contributing to the stability and development of the whole society.

The second National Action Plan to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 covers the years 2012–2016. The Action Plan addresses three main areas: conflict prevention, peace negotiations and peacebuilding; crisis management; and strengthening, protecting and safeguarding the human rights of women and girls. The second Action Plan also introduced research and communication as well as monitoring and reporting, including indicators.

A cross-sectorial group led by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs monitors the implementation of the Action Plan. Every year a progress report on the implementation is given to Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. This involves Parliament in this theme in a unique way. Non-governmental organisations have formed their own, very active 1325-network and made an important contribution in Finland to everything that relates to Resolution 1325 and related resolutions.

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