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Short report by NGO Coordination post Beijing Switzerland on Switzerland's 4th and 5th country report Pre-session of the CEDAW Committee, 7 March 2016

The NGO Coordination post Beijing Switzerland comprises roughly 30 organizations, including umbrella organizations, that cover the entire political and social spectrum in Switzerland, and together campaign for women's rights in Switzerland. In collaboration with other women's organizations, we examined Switzerland's fourth and fifth country report and the current situation of women in Switzerland and produced a shadow report. In what follows, we cite the issues that we feel need to be implemented most urgently in order to achieve de facto equality or that still require major changes.

Switzerland actively campaigned for the 2030 Agenda to include goals connected to the issue of equality. Now women in Switzerland expect the government to ensure that the concrete measures contained in the upcoming strategy for sustainable development in Switzerland also include gender-specific measures.

Promotion of equality between men and women (Art. 1-4, particularly Art. 4)

Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in administration, the private sector and politics. Although some cities and cantons have introduced quota systems, this has not happened at the national level. All voluntary attempts to increase the number of women on administrative and executive boards have failed to have the desired effect.

Questions for Switzerland

- What measures is Switzerland taking to ensure that more women enter and remain in leadership positions in administration and the private sector?
- What measures is Switzerland taking to increase the number of women in the legislative and executive bodies?

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Member organisations: alliance F, Bund schweizerischer jüdischer Frauenorganisationen BSJF, CEVI Schweiz, Coordination romande Suivi de Pékin, Demokratische Juristinnen Schweiz DJS, Die feministische Friedensorganisation cfd, Evangelische Frauen Schweiz EFS, Fachstelle Frauenhandel und Frauenmigration FIZ, Frauen für den Frieden, Frauenrat für Aussenpolitik FrAu, Friedensfrauen Weltweit, IAMANEH Schweiz, Juristinnen Schweiz, Pfadibewegung Schweiz PBS, Schweiz. Bäuerinnen und Landfrauenverband SBLV, Schweizer FrauenSynode, Schweiz. Kath. Frauenbund SKF, Schweizer Syndikat Medienschaffender SSM, Schweiz. Verband alleinerziehender Mütter + Väter SVAMV, Schweiz. Verband für Frauenrechte adf-svf, SP Frauen Schweiz, SWONET, TERRE DES FEMMES, Verband Christkatholischer Frauen Schweiz VCF, Verband Wirtschaftsfrauen Schweiz, Women's World Summit Foundation WWSF

Measures

- A practical and binding quota system (Art. 4) with a penalty system must be introduced until actual gender ratios are reflected.

Stereotypes (Art. 5, 10)

Traditional gender roles and stereotypes are widespread in Switzerland and are also reflected in career choices. Stereotypes are, among other things, one of the main causes of gender-based violence, which is also one of the main forms of violence in Switzerland. Advertisers and the media play a decisive role in cementing gender stereotypes. Although Switzerland has taken a variety of measures – as described in the country report – no fundamental socio-political discussion on gender hierarchies is taking place.

Questions for Switzerland

- What is Switzerland doing to break down gender stereotypes?
- Does Switzerland have binding rules on stereotypes / role models in education and particularly as regards teaching materials?
- Does Switzerland have rules and penalties for advertisers and the media / for reporting in the media?

Measures

- Gender roles and stereotypes must be addressed at all levels of education. Gender-sensitive teaching materials must be produced throughout Switzerland, and the subject must be made part of teaching training programmes.
- In particular, the promotion of women in STEM careers must be further intensified, and federal decrees on career choices and schooling must be put into practice.
- The development and implementation of an information and education strategy that aims to disseminate non-sexist images of men and women is to be promoted. Guidelines, professional rules and control mechanisms for advertising and the media must be drawn up.
- In order to comply with international obligations to tackle stereotypes and violence in line with Articles 5 and 10 of the CEDAW, a complaints authority for issues related to sexism and gender stereotypes must be established.

Equal pay (Art. 1-4, 11)

Little has changed in terms of the unequal distribution of power and money, of paid and unpaid work. Women are affected by unequal pay and by wage discrimination as soon as they enter the world of work.

The measures taken to raise awareness of the issue are having little effect. Successes are still only visible in those areas where the state imposes obligatory measures (e.g. wage monitoring in the case of tenders). However, these measures can currently only be implemented in a very limited way because the legal foundation is lacking in some cases, and there are insufficient funds available for monitoring.

Questions for Switzerland

- Why is Switzerland not taking consistent action against the persistent and inexplicable differences in wages?

Measures

- A joint wage commission that carries out spot checks must be introduced. The steps should be the same as with the Competition Commission (COMCO): monitor, investigate, impose penalties. The aim is to achieve equal pay and transparency in pay-related matters.
- All companies and administrations must prove that men and women are equal in terms of their pay. If pay equality does not exist, corrective measures and penalties must be defined.

Taxation (Art. 1-4)

The current tax system contradicts the principle that people should be taxed according to their economic capacity.

Married couples with two incomes are at a disadvantage compared to cohabiting couples. The problem with the taxation of married couples is that the wife's generally lower and part-time income is taxed at a disproportionately high level, which means that many women do not work at all.

Working parents are at a disadvantage because childcare costs are only taken into account up to a certain amount. Furthermore, childcare costs can only be deducted as social security contributions, not as business expenses. Under some cantonal tax laws, parents can deduct childcare costs even if they don't actually have such expenses.

Questions for Switzerland

- What is being done to remove these inequities, and in particular what is being done to finally introduce individual taxation and to make childcare costs tax-deductible in the same way as all other employment-related expenditure?

Measures

- Individual taxation must be introduced in order to achieve gender-independent, fair taxation.
- Employment-related childcare costs must be recognized as the same type of expenditure as all other business expenses, and must be made tax deductible.

Tackling violence against women (Art. 1-4, 16, and General Recommendation Nr. 19)

Although numerous measures have been taken, violence towards women / domestic violence continues to make up around half of the violent crimes reported to the police. The measures taken so far often fall short. The fight against gender-specific violence must be focused at the roots of the gender hierarchy – i.e. gender stereotypes and the associated social norms must be changed. The lack of political will to finance women's shelters and the lack of a national action plan are also problematic.

Questions for Switzerland

- What is the situation with state financing for women's shelters?
- Does Switzerland intend to produce an action plan on domestic violence?

Measures

- Financing for women's shelters must be secured.
- A national action plan must be drawn up and the necessary funds made available to tackle violence against women.
- It must be ensured that foreign victims of domestic violence can remain in Switzerland after they have separated from their violent spouse (Art. 50, para 1, let. b, Foreign Nationals Act FNA).

Refugee women (Art. 1-3, 5, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16, and General Recommendation Nr. 32)

Although the CEDAW Committee extensively specified the states' obligations in General Recommendation Nr. 32, Switzerland's report does not mention the situation of refugee women and women going through asylum procedures.

Questions for Switzerland

- When does Switzerland intend to present a detailed and comprehensive evaluation, which takes account of General Recommendation No. 32, of the situation of refugee women and women asylum seekers going through asylum procedures?

Measures

- Binding quality guidelines concerning infrastructure and support must be drawn up for property or land that is provided to the federal or cantonal governments for the purpose of housing asylum seekers. Compliance with the guidelines must be monitored.