

HRH the Crown Princess' remarks at the Conference to launch the
Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023
on 3 May, 2018, Copenhagen

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen – Good morning,

In January, I had the honor of visiting Strasbourg and addressing the Parliamentary Assembly at its first session of 2018. During my visit, the dedication and commitment from the people working in the Council of Europe to the many important subjects on the human rights agenda, including Global Goal number five – for gender equality was very clear. It is indeed a pleasure to have a second opportunity to address such a distinguished audience of experts and decision makers from the Council of Europe and its Member States, this time here in Denmark, my home.

Gender equality for me is not about negating the differences between men and women – we are 'very' different and that's OK.

Actually, I have heard it said that the difference in the brain between sexes is a lot less different than between individuals. So, it's about gender not playing a role when it comes to the opportunities and decisions in one's life.

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and equal opportunities are key to a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Greater gender equality in a country is linked to a higher level of education and better health, higher per capita income, stronger international competitiveness and more inclusive and rapid economic growth. An often-quoted number is the 28 trillion USD that would be added to the world's annual GDP by 2025 if women had the same opportunities and rights as men.

Greater gender equality will create some of the greatest opportunities of our time. And gender equality is so far from being just about women and for women, it is an issue that affects each and every one of us. It must be a common agenda, because we share a common dream of a more inclusive and equal world.

Paving the way for greater gender equality depends on political dedication, public commitment and legislation. But, it also takes knowledge and experience, best practices and inspiration if we are to fulfill the potential of every girl, boy, woman and man. The Council of Europe deserves acknowledgment for its ambition and its dedication in this respect which is further reinforced by the launch of the Council of Europe's new strategy for Gender Equality.

But, there is no easy solution; inequality is characterized by many different and complex factors. In order to affect the real change we desire, I believe we have to have a greater focus on the role of social norms and unconscious biases and the barriers they present. For example, our social norms in many ways influence women's economic opportunities; they frame a woman's choice of education and career, and they reflect and strengthen discriminating stereotypes, which can affect equal pay and promotion.

Gender stereotypes create a widely accepted judgment or bias about certain characteristics or traits that apply to each gender.

For example, that all men love sport or that they all men are good at maths. Stereotypes lead to unconscious biases that affect our decisions and evaluations. And because it is an unconscious act, we actually believe that we are not gender biased.

We need to become conscious of our unconscious biases and knowledgeable about the effect they have on our decision-making.

We know that gendered expectations are produced and reproduced from kindergarten, to university, in families, on the streets, as well as in the work place. In too many countries both boys and girls continue to make gender stereotypical choices of education. Especially in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math - the so-called STEM-subjects, where there exists a significant gender-bias, too few girls are pursuing an education or career in STEM.

A 2015 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) survey showed that parents to a lesser

degree expect their daughters to choose a technical or scientific education. It is time to challenge traditional attitudes and gendered expectations of boys and girls - as parents, educators, teachers, brothers, sisters and mentors. It's about creating greater opportunities. It's about breaking down traditional expectations and opening up all opportunities to boys and girls and for them to choose freely.

[Preventing and combating Violence against Women]

Violence against women is one of the strongest manifestations of gender in-equality and is one of the areas in which the Council of Europe has raised the bar.

The Istanbul Convention is the gold standard for international human rights protection in this area. It sets standards for prevention, support services, data collection and law – standards that shape policies across Europe and beyond – and positively affect the lives and opportunities of women and girls.

The Convention as well as the Gender Equality Strategy highlights the fact that violence against women and girls can take many forms – with physical violence typically being the focus of attention. Understandably, with one in every four women in the European Region being subjected to intimate partner violence in her lifetime. Physical violence is one of the most severe forms of violence, but we must also address other types of violence like stalking and psychological violence.

In Denmark, studies indicate that more than 100.000 people – 2/3 of these being women - are victims of stalking every year. Stalking often occurs in connection with a break-up or divorce and the consequences can be quite severe, affecting the everyday lives of the victims.

Stalking can lead to fear and anxiety being suffered when for example leaving the home, which in turn affects employment - and social relations. The situation also affects children and their well-being. For these reasons tackling stalking and supporting victims is important to include in our common goal of a society free of violence.

Likewise, psychological violence needs to be better understood, defined and highlighted as an area for increased focus. The prevalence of psychological violence is unknown, but we know that it is present in most cases where physical violence occurs. We also know that many people – especially young people – have difficulties in recognizing this as a form of violence.

We must support these young women and men to become more aware of the dynamics of violence and its many forms in order to promote healthy relationships based on respect and equality. We need to empower them to be able to say “Stop” if someone disrespects their personal boundaries and starts to negatively control or manipulate them.

49 countries in the world still lack laws that protect women from domestic violence - countries need to enact and enforce comprehensive legal frameworks and policies that protect both men and women.

[Combating Gender Stereotypes and Sexism]

Pictures, words and phrases reproduce the way we perceive normality and each other. And we are bombarded with them, like never before. We often don't even notice it. Gender stereotypes have always been part of our cultural backdrop.

Girls and boys continue to be judged on their appearance and sexual activities in a traditional stereotypical way. Boys are expected to behave masculine and girls feminine.

Girls' bodies are often more sexualized – but at the same time, they are more often shamed for behaving sexualized.

And girls are more dissatisfied with their bodies than boys, which may explain why more girls than boys experience mental health issues.

How can we tell girls that they are free to pursue their dreams and find their own identity if the concept of normality on social media restrains them?

Well, fortunately, the world is slowly changing.

The Committee of Ministers' Recommendation to combat sexism is an important step in addressing this issue. And the current work in the ad hoc committee on sexism could in due time promote new global standards for the understanding of sexism and its consequences.

[Achieve balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making]

Gender balance in decision-making processes and politics has not yet been achieved in any member state.

In fact, only 23.7% of world parliamentarians are women, and only 8% are business leaders.

And 95% of the world's heads of state are men.

The Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on balanced participation of women and men in political and public life is an important step towards achieving gender balance.

Sustainable growth cannot be achieved if gender equality does not exist in leadership and decision-making at all levels. Striving for greater gender equality in decision-making is not only the right thing to do; it is clearly the smart thing to do.

If we look at the private sector, for instance, the business case for promoting gender equality is convincing. A growing body of evidence points to the many ways that women contribute to each link of the business value chain; as suppliers, leaders, employees, customers, and entrepreneurs. So, when companies

improve conditions for girls and women, it also makes good business sense.

[Outro]

I hope that your discussions today and tomorrow on concrete ways of implementing the strategy and promoting equal opportunities in all our member states will ensure real changes for the 820 million citizens living in our 47 member states.

Real change comes not only from strong leadership, legislation and enforcement but, also from challenging our mindsets, questioning our social norms, and becoming aware of our unconscious biases. It requires the involvement everyone as it is an issue of great importance for us all.

And who are better placed than the Council of Europe to bring best practices and expertise together in this common strive for greater gender equality. The new strategy sends a clear signal.

We want to ensure equal opportunities for women and men and we want to ensure it now.

Let this conference be an accelerator for all the 47 member states to join forces and to proceed to make real progress for a future where boys and girls, men and women can lead, participate, shape and dare to challenge the world of tomorrow.

Thank you.