

Expert Conference on Sexual Violence against Women and Children in Sports
The National Museum of Finland, 29–30 April 2019
Opening session (13:00)
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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to welcome you to Helsinki.

Today and tomorrow, we will be discussing a very serious topic, sexual violence. The fact, that it is a difficult subject, makes it even more important that all sections of society, including the sports sector, engage in a broad dialogue to address it. When the #metoo movement began to spread a few years ago, many said it was about time, and it certainly was.

Despite its listing as the happiest country in the world, Finland is fighting with these same issues. Our country again topped the list in the UN World Happiness Report, which looks at how people experience social conditions. All Nordic welfare states ranked high on the list. A welfare state is based on democracy, gender equality, justice and good governance.

The Council of Europe's work defends these same values. Now we are seeing increasing attempts to challenge equality and women's rights. The Finnish Presidency of the Council of Europe is coming to an end. Finland's main goal has been to further strengthen the crucial work of the Council in advancing human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Equality and women's rights have been present in all of the Presidency goals.

Finland has joined in the common effort to prevent violence against women. During the Finnish Presidency, we have also discussed ways to eliminate sexual abuse of children at all levels in society. We will focus both these aspects on in this Conference.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We can take a lot and will not easily give in to despair. But violence has a devastating impact on happiness. Sexual violence is considered a particularly damaging form of violence, and it has far-

reaching consequences. It is critical to consider how victims get help and what kind of encounters they have during the stages of recovery and the legal process.

The international and national regulatory systems have been created to safeguard people. With regard to sexual violence, the Lanzarote and Istanbul Conventions, along with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, have become key components of this system. In addition, Finland has a strong national regulatory base. Even, the Finnish Sports Act seeks to promote equality between women and men, and growth and development of children and young people. These make up part of the conditions, which sports organisations must meet to receive government aid.

Recent studies have found that acts of sexual violence have been committed across the spectrum of Finnish sports, both in organised and non-organised sports. While studies have been conducted, we still need more information about the problem and the tools to tackle it. In the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Advisory Board for Sport-related Ethical Matters a year ago expressed its concern about sexual harassment and abuse of children and young people in sports. The Board challenged the sports sector to introduce and develop measures to identify, address and prevent any incidents. Several measures should be adopted. They include clear rules for preventing all kinds of harassment and abuse, and a code of conduct that can be followed if harassment or abuse has taken place. In the future, sports clubs should be more systematic in checking the criminal background of candidates when they recruit volunteers.

Both the authorities and the sports community have already taken action to address the situation in Finland. The sports community has drawn up equality and non-discrimination plans, which the Ministry has requested in order for sports organisations to qualify for government aid. These plans are an obvious tool for preventing, systematically monitoring and combating sexual harassment and violence. Late last year, organisations that promote physical activity were surveyed about sexual harassment. While 73 per cent of the respondents said the organisation's rules enabled them to have measures to tackle harassment, only around half of the respondents had a code of conduct for addressing the incidents.

Last week the Ministry and the Olympic Committee together organised a training for preventing sexual harassment and abuse and for tackling the incidents and this work will continue. During this Conference, you will hear about the 'You are not alone' (Et ole yksin) support service organised jointly by sports organisations and Västöliitto, the Family Federation of Finland. Its

purpose is to prevent and reduce incidents of bullying, sexual harassment and all kinds of violence in sports. Furthermore, the Olympic Committee has drawn up guidelines, which includes code of conduct for preventing incidents and for dealing with harassment and abuse.

Still, there is much work to do at the national level. Pushing ahead the national initiatives hand in hand with the Start to Talk –campaign, is the way forward.

Dear Friends,

It is important for the sports community to be aware of sexual violence, to recognise what forms it can take, and to have the ability to immediately address any issues that may arise. Sports organisations and clubs, along with all the other providers of physical activity and sports services, must nurture an atmosphere where violence is prevented, where people are listened to, and where even sensitive topics can be approached. We seek to create a culture where intervention is a norm, not an exception.

This Conference will provide you with information and tools for achieving such a culture.

I now wish to thank the Council of Europe, Enlarged partial agreement of sport / EPAS secretariat for their efforts in preparing this conference and for their excellent cooperation.

Finland intends to continue this discussion in the European forums, including in the Council of Europe and during our forthcoming Presidency of the EU Council.

With these words, I wish you all a successful and productive Conference.

(After this event, tomorrow, you might join in a happy and boisterous street party.)