GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION (GEC)

Are we there yet? Assessing progress, inspiring action: the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 Conference organised by the Council of Europe in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia

30 June – 1 July 2016

Tallinn, Estonia

Your Excellency the Prime minister of Estonia,
Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Dear Friends,

- I thank the Government of Estonia, as the host country and the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) of the Council of Europe for organizing this very important Conference on the European strategy on gender equality.
- I am pleased to be here in this beautiful city of Tallinn and pay tribute to the great women of Estonia and Europe who have striven and relentlessly strive everyday so that we may see a new dawn of where all women and girls realize gender equality, freedom from violence, full empowerment and potential one that the Singer of the Dawn Lydia Koidula, the legendary poetess, writer, founder of Estonian theatre and millions like her dream of.
- It's important that Europe meets now at this historic juncture of the making of the Global Project on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) as

Europe has both a lead in the push for progress in this most important 21st century project for humanity but also the special responsibility to be flag bearers of it for the world.

Given Europe's leadership on GEWE, what's the seismic change normatively in the world and how does that change the quest for a Planet 50/50 by 2030 latest?

- The year 2015 was **glorious for its path-breaking intergovernmental normative achievements and the consolidation of the highest level of political commitment from governments, including most -if not all - members of the Council of Europe and the UN System**.
- Including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the normative achievements on gender equality in 2015 are strong rungs on the ladder to gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- The recommitment to the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA) -- resulted from its 20 year review process -- served as one of the keystones for the 2030 Agenda.
- The outcome document (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) of the Third International Financing for Development (FfD) Conference positioned the gender equality agenda into the mainstream of international financing development discussions and as a central tenet of the 2030 Agenda.
- The High-level Review of implementation of Security **Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security** resulted in a new resolution, 2242, which strengthened and expanded the women, peace and security agenda.

- The **Paris Agreement on climate change** commits Parties for the first time to respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, as well as on gender equality.
- This movement towards consolidating the centrality of gender equality in the normative arena was further strengthened by the **high-level summit** during the seventieth session of the United Nations General Assembly with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Beyond that, UN Women and the Government of China co-organized the **Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment** which convened a great number of Heads of State and Government — including many members of the Council of Europe—, who highlighted progress and recommitted to accelerated action on the empowerment of women in the context of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Overall, the seismic normative change has been the merger of the global development agenda with the gender equality aspiration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**
- The comprehensive successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is a universal, trifold and indivisible framework of all the dimensions of sustainable development – whether economic, environmental or social.
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs, cover issues from poverty eradication, access to water and energy, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, to cities, climate change and peaceful societies.

- It also incorporates strong references to human rights, ending discrimination, violence, and inequality as the basis of transformation for all women and girls, individuals and countries, both developed and developing.

Women's progress will play a pivotal role in the achievement of the SDGs

- A climax point in the normative gains of 2015 is the recognition that achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment, not only as a sustainable development goal, but as 'a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets' in order to realize the Agenda's objectives of people, planet and prosperity for all.
- The SDGs include a strong stand-alone goal (SDG 5) on "Achieving – not just promoting -- gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls" and which zooms in on unequal power relations between women and men and addresses the structural barriers that hold back progress for women and girls, including:
    - ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls;
    - recognizing unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies;
    - ensuring women's participation and leadership in political and economic life;
    - women's universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights;
    - And women equal rights to economic resources – land, property and financial services.

- In all the targets of SDG 5, there is a connection with investment and empowerment of women and girls throughout their life cycle. Moreover, SDG 5 is accompanied by gender-specific targets and indicators across other goals, constituting what we call the gender equality compact of the 2030 Agenda.

How the Member States of the Council of Europe have a pathfinder responsibility in showing this is mission possible?

- The historic gender equality compact of the 2030 Agenda offers an unmissable opportunity to accelerate progress and achieve the objective within a generation.
- In this regard, the Agreed Conclusions emanated from the 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women defined the guiding principles to ensuring the full, effective and accelerated gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- And I would like to refer in particular to the Commission's recommendation on gender stereotypes and social norms, which are also one of the strategic priorities of the Gender Equality Strategy 2014 – 2017 of the Council of Europe.
- You may recall that the Commission called upon Member States and the other actors to understand and address the root causes of gender inequality such as unequal power relations, social norms, practices and stereotypes that perpetuate discrimination against women and girls.
- In its recommendations, the Commission included the need for engaging men and boys in designing and implementing national policies and programmes

related to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, as well as in ensuring equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in caregiving and domestic work, eliminating social norms that condone violence against women and girls, and attitudes and social norms by which women and girls are regarded as subordinate to men and boys.

- Furthermore, the Commission recognized that achieving the 2030 Agenda requires changing the current gender-based division of labour to ensure that unpaid care and domestic work is equally shared, recognized, reduced and redistributed.
- At addressing the gender-based stereotypes and of social norms among the root causes of gender inequality, the Commission signaled out its determination to create a **new normal in society** both as a means to and result of a gender-responsive implementation and achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

- **In placing gender equality at the core of an 'all of government' approach,** Member States may also recall the commitments they adopted through the Political Declaration emanated from the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 59) in March 2015, which provided a set of global policy recommendations to guide national gender-responsive implementation, including:
  - strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks;
  - fostering an enabling environment for financing for development;
  - strengthening women's leadership and full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas;

- strengthening gender-responsive data collection and analysis; and
- enhancing national institutional arrangements.

- All these recommendations from the Commission on the Status of Women in the last two years should be fully incorporated as key components of the Council's Gender Equality Strategy. They will significantly contribute to advancing the Council's commitment to affirming women's fundamental rights and asserting their agency to its full potential, as well as to positioning gender equality as the **new social norm of Planet 5050 by 2030 latest**.

Global level: High-level Political Forum

- Countries are getting ready to review progress at the High-level Political Forum in New York in July 2016. A number of countries will make national voluntary reviews, almost half of them are Member States of the Council of Europe. This process of review will serve to highlight their work to put the 2030 Agenda into practice.
- We encourage reporting by Member States from the Council of Europe to report gender equality work in the context of their implementation of the 2030 Agenda with a particular focus on SDG 5, in particular lessons learned in integrating gender into planning processes; good practices examples and remaining challenges.
- The risk is that insufficient linkages are made between existing gender-responsive mechanisms and policies and national efforts to translate the 2030 Agenda into reality.

- Multi-stakeholder participation can help to overcome silo-thinking and monitor at all stages that national implementation efforts deliver for women and girls – in all countries.

While Europe has made great progress, gaps and challenges persist and regression can happen.

- Two years after the adoption of the Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 by the Council of Europe, the assessment to be taken during these two days will ascertain that we are no yet there!!
- Across Europe women are underrepresented in decision-making positions, particularly in politics and business, even if the situation varies between European countries.
    - As of May 2016, women accounted for 25.7 per cent of members of the single or lower houses of parliaments in the OSCE member countries, including the Nordic countries. (according to the data available at IPU)
    - In business leadership the situation is particularly disappointing: As of 2016, women account for just 25 per cent of the Boards of the 600 largest European-listed companies.
- From traditional gender roles and stereotypes, the lack of support for women and men to balance care responsibilities with work and the prevalent political and corporate cultures, the causes for the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes and positions are multiple, complex, and they demand further action within the context of the gender equality strategy in order to define a comprehensive approach to tackle them.

- Women's economic independence is a crucial to gender equality. Yet while women's labour market involvement has steadily increased in European countries in the last 50 years, inequalities between women and men in relation to unpaid care work are a persistent feature of gender relations.
- Violence against women in its different forms, while better addressed by legislation, in practice it continues to remain the most widespread and less punished violation of women's human rights. The ratification of the Convention on preventing and combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) by a growing number of countries should accelerate change in this respect.

Inspiring Action - the 10 Is

- The membership of the Council of Europe has a great potential to be flag bearers and prove that gender equality is mission possible.
- In this regards, UN Women has proposed the vectors of ten "I's" needed to ensure a gender-responsive implementation of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:
- **Inspiration** from the intergovernmental normative frameworks and human rights conventions including the historic Gender Equality Compact and commitments last year to achieve sustainable development.
- **Indivisibility** of the SDGs and targets - horizontal and vertical. All SDGs must deliver for gender equality and women's empowerment. The prioritization of SDG 5 and gender-sensitive targets threaded across all SDGs is a great decision by all governments.

- **Integration** and systematic mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment across all SDGs and the entire 2030 Agenda implementation in its three dimensions, an all-of-government approach including in development assistance activities and initiatives.
- **Institutions** - Gender equality mechanisms, that are most often under-resourced and lack authority, need to be strengthened and supported to influence implementation across all policy areas. Also, gender equality must be a top priority in decision-making about national strategies and plans, including the development cooperation policies, institutional arrangements, budgets and monitoring mechanisms to implement the SDGs.
- **Investment** - significantly increased and enhanced financial investment and resources mobilization from all sources, including ODA and the development cooperation policies, to ensure transformative actions for financing GEWE as committed to in the 2030 Agenda (paragraph 20) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The Council promoting a percentage of ODA to be dedicated to GEWE and the evaluation of its impact would be its most transformative contribution to the 2030 Agenda.
- **Information** - generating comprehensive GEWE related data, statistics, indicators, monitoring systems, frameworks, and capacities in the SDGs implementation, follow-up and review at all levels is critical to assess progress and gaps and guide policies and actions.
- **Inclusion** of all stakeholders, including women's movements, indigenous women, youth, men and boys, faith-based organizations and the private sector for movement building, transforming social norms and addressing the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization that women often

face. This is also key to addressing root causes of conflict, migration and refugee flows, and preventing and countering violent extremism.

- **Innovation** - driving political and social innovation, science, technology and innovation (STI), modalities and means of implementation, information and communications technology (ICT), and media, including social media, innovative partnerships and advocacy platforms.
- **Implementation** - localization through adoption and reform of laws, policies and measures including special measures and actions, the removal of discriminatory laws and policies, and ensuring their full, effective and accelerated implementation.
- **Impact** - these commitments must lead to actual change in the enabling environment and make systemic and substantive impact on the situation of all women and girls, especially those most marginalized.
- Let us seize the opportunity of this meeting to generate a basis to ensure that the Council of Europe and its membership are “fit for purpose” to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and to address and navigate the challenging global context and its impact on women and girls.
- UN Women stands ready to support you in this process so that women and girls can fully develop their potential, and fully enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms everywhere.

Let me finalize remembering writer Virginia Woolf …

"As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world."

Gender equality is not about a country or a society. Gender equality is about the whole world.

Planet 50-50 by 2030. Let us step it up for Gender Equality and the empowerment of all women and girls everywhere!

I thank you!!