

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Gréta Gunnarsdóttir
Permanent Representative of Iceland
56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

Madame Chair

At the outset allow me to extend warm greetings from the Icelandic Minister of Welfare, Mr. Hannesson, who could not be with us today.

Madame Chair,

CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action are mutually reinforcing in the quest to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. While we are pleased to note how many countries have ratified CEDAW, we continue to be disturbed by the high number of reservations and call upon those States which have made reservations incompatible with the purposes and objective of the treaty, to immediately withdraw them.

Gender equality in Iceland

Madame Chair,

For the third consecutive year Iceland is at the top on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index. Enormous progress has been made in the past decades while we still have a number of challenges to overcome.

As recent achievements are concerned, I would first of all like to inform the Commission that the Icelandic Government is for the first time lead by a woman Prime Minister.

Secondly, the Government has incorporated gender-responsive budgeting. This is one of the measures taken to ensure that the effects of the financial crisis do not undermine achievements in the field of gender equality.

Thirdly, the Parliament has amended the legislation on restraining orders, making it easier to provide protection to victims of domestic violence, by allowing competent authorities to remove the violator from the household.

Fourthly, an Icelandic NGO, Stígamót, which is represented here today, and has for a long time provided valuable assistance to victims of sexual violence, including through sending counsellors to rural areas to bring services where there are otherwise none, has now established a centre to assist victims of prostitution and human trafficking.

As regards challenges, the gender pay gap continues to be on the top of the agenda. Another persistent challenge is the gender imbalance on private sector company boards. To address this we now have a legislation which objective is for women to represent at least 40% of board members by the end of 2013.

Rural women

Turning to the theme of the current session rural women represent a resource with an enormous potential for growth and benefit for their societies. To realize their potential they need to be accorded full and equal rights to own and lease land, have equal rights to inheritance and have access to financial services. They also need to have equal access to education and health facilities, two important tools for women's empowerment.

The ability of women to control their own fertility is fundamental to women's empowerment and equality. Therefore, investing in women's health includes sexual and reproductive health. We need to increase access to contraception and family planning to enable women and adolescent girls to make decisions regarding their sexuality and fertility. This is particularly true for rural women and other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Women, particularly in rural areas, affect and are affected by climate change in different ways than men. It is therefore crucial to use a gender-sensitive approach when designing and implementing climate change policies and to ensure an active role of women at all levels of decision-making and financing. Iceland has worked hard with others to include gender considerations in a new international agreement on climate change. We will also work with others to ensure that the outcome of Rio+20 includes strong references to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Advancing gender equality

Madame Chair,

Ensuring women's political rights is extremely important for women's empowerment. Iceland was encouraged by women rising up last year and speaking out in countries where their voices have for far too long been too silent. The impact of the "Arab Spring" will, however, be very limited if women do not participate fully in the political process that now follows. We hope to see the Arab spring of women rights proliferate throughout the region, including in countries hitherto untouched. We also would like to express our serious concern about the negative effects of the occupation on Palestinian women living in the oPt.

Violence against women

The theme of violence against women for the 57th session of the CSW is well chosen. We hope that next year we will be able to address all types of violence against women, including domestic violence, which exists in all our societies, as well as violence in special circumstances, such as sexual violence in armed conflict.

Thank you, Madame Chair