

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ARCTIC
Current Realities, Future Challenges
30–31 October 2014

Gender Equality in the Arctic – Setting the scene

Statement by President Tarja Halonen

Mr. Foreign Minister and all other Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to be back here in Akureyri and discuss the efforts towards greater gender equality in the Arctic. I would like to extend my warmest thanks to the organizers for gathering and inviting all of us to this important conference.

Twelve years ago, in 2002, Finland organized the Arctic Council Gender Equality Conference entitled *Taking Wing* in Lapland. It was the Arctic Council's first conference focusing on the promotion of gender equality. Three themes were discussed in that conference: *Women and Work*, *Gender and self-determination* and *Violence against women*. Today we will discuss the current realities and future challenges concerning gender equality in the Arctic.

Despite progress made in terms of commitments to women's rights and gender equality during the last decade, women and girls still suffer from violence and discrimination across the globe, regrettably also in the Arctic. At the same time, the Arctic is facing a number of other challenges such as climate change, youth unemployment and women's outmigration. We need closer and broader cooperation and more efficient work with partners both in the Arctic and beyond to tackle these and other challenges.

Economic policies have different implications for women and men. However, according to research and statistics, gender equality is smart economics: it can enhance economic efficiency and improve a broad range of development outcomes. The economies are also larger and more versatile when both women and men participate fully as equals. The continued domination of one gender is not smart policy.

In practice this means that the needs of women and girls must also be better taken into account when considering cuts to public spending. It is highly

important for example that sexual and reproductive health services are provided despite long distances. A woman can be an active participant in her society and community only if her sexual and reproductive health and rights are fully fulfilled.

Another serious obstacle in the full enjoyment of human rights for women and girls is violence against women, including trafficking and prostitution. Intervening in violent situations can be particularly difficult in small communities where everybody knows each other. It is also difficult for a victim to get special care and attention in a small community for fear of being stigmatized. However, coordinated efforts to prevent this phenomenon, to protect victims and punish the perpetrators must be continued. Everyone must have the right to live without violence and fear of it.

Problems related to women's ownership, inheritance and control and management of natural resources also hinder women's opportunities in the Arctic. Climate change is very likely to affect the productivity and the use of land, and thus further increases the fragility related to land ownership. Therefore discussions on climate change, gender equality, ownership and control rights, and environmental protection must be closely interlinked. The law and equal and effective access to justice must be safeguarded for all.

Both women and men, indigenous and non-indigenous people, must have equal opportunities to take part in political, economic, cultural and social life and decision-making and leadership at all levels. Women can also for example offer knowledge, skills and first-hand experience of many practical aspects of life that have so far been left in the shadows. As the significance of the Arctic is growing, it is even more important to involve a greater number of women in the Arctic governing bodies, administrations and businesses. When women have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making and have equal access to labour markets, also the impetus for out-migration declines.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When discussing gender equality, the role of men and boys must not be underestimated. They have a crucial role to play in women's empowerment. I strongly encourage all of us to think how men could be brought in as even more active partners in this collaboration. I am happy to see this atmosphere here!

Let me mention here the HeForShe Campaign which was launched by the UN Women in New York in September. The idea is to create a vast solidarity movement in which men across the globe commit to take action against all forms of violence and discrimination faced by women and men. I challenge all men here to visit the website HeForShe.org and sign-up!

To conclude,

Many of the challenges in the Arctic are of a global nature and some are maybe more regionally and culturally specific. We are working on many fronts to find solutions to find a path towards a more sustainable global development model which is key also to the survival and wellbeing of the Arctic regions.

We have understood and agreed that a sustainable future entails that all three aspects – the social, economic and environmental – are addressed as we make decisions about how to tackle the common challenges that accompany us into the future.

We also know that we need all our human potential and capital to find a new way. A lot of human resources are still untapped. In Brazil at the Rio+20 Summit, we agreed that especially the creative talents of the young and too many women are underused as are the skills and experience of the poor. I want to stress here again, that gender equality is not only a human rights issue, but also an economic, social and development issue. It is a smart investment, it is smart economics.

Dear Friends,

I believe that together we will make this conference fruitful. We will generate and provide the Arctic Council, the national and regional bodies and each one of us more tools and ideas to work with even more energy and efficiency towards greater gender equality in the Arctic. I also strongly welcome the Icelandic cooperation for Beijing+20

I wish you all a very successful conference. This conference I will follow with a great interest also due to my own duties in the UN and in other tasks.

Thank you.