

ORAL Statement to the CEDAW Committee

Presentation on the Alternative Report by the Finnish NGO NYTKIS (Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations)

BY Ms. Elina Laavi and Ms. Leena Ruusuvaori, members of the board

Madam chair,

I with my colleague represent **NYTKIS the Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations**, which has coordinated alternative report with the input of nearly 100 individual organizations.

General comments

The Government is pursuing a policy of mainstreaming gender; while resisting implementation of substantive gender equality. General attitude is to achieve gender neutral legislation and authorities think that no specific measures need to be taken to provide corrective steps or enabling conditions so that women can achieve equality as a result. Gender equality is addressed by the theme of "Men and equality". The historical point of view that has led to the need of Equality Act is not recognized. The result has been a competition between equality work for women versus the work done with men.

Equality machinery is under resourced and is mainly concerned with implementing small projects.

We would like to draw your attention to six themes.

1. *Legislative framework: combining Equality Act and Non-Discrimination Act*
2. *Violence against women and trafficking*
3. *Minority women*
4. *Sexual minority women*
5. *Employment and reconciliation of work and family life*
6. *Situation of girls: health, education and stereotyping*

1. Legislative framework: consolidating Equality Act and Non-Discrimination Act

The plan to consolidate Equality Act and Non-Discrimination Act is a threat to the realization of women's rights. The lack of willingness to invest resources in implementation of the two Acts stems from the lack of understanding of the way in which substantive equality is to be ensured for women. According to the Government's report, different vulnerabilities and realities do not require specific responses [page 5]. The government is offering the rationale that the way in which multiple discrimination issues can be addressed is through the lens of 'discrimination' rather than recognizing the difference between gender and various forms of discrimination of minorities. This poses a real threat as it takes away from recognition of the structural disadvantages faced by women.

2. Violence against women

Since ratifying the CEDAW many new legal instruments have been created concerning violence, but they are not gender specific. While the government has taken part in the Council of Europe campaign violence against women, it has still to provide adequate protection or mechanism to address. In fact, the women of Finland are being denied protective legislation against Domestic violence on a so-called technicality and a deliberate misunderstanding of the directive of the CEDAW Committee.

Rape crimes have doubled in the last 15 years, yet there is only one rape crises center in Finland with two branch offices and only one secret shelter for victims. These are provided by NGO's. The number and the quality of shelter places for battered women do not meet recommendations of EU and Council of Europe.

The status of women of minority communities clearly needs special attention, as they face even more complex manifestation of violence at home and at work.

The NGO's are deeply concerned with the lack of enforcement of the plan of actions to support the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and punitive action against the perpetrators. The Government's response to the lack of enforcement is inadequate as they claim that they have no information as the law enforcement databases are not compatible.

3. Minority women

The absence of understanding of specific contexts has impacted on ability to ensure full protection of the human rights of women of the minority communities. Government's policies and programs for minority groups do not recognize women's status or needs.

Women in indigenous Sami community are poorly represented in political life. The state has not taken into account their special needs in providing services, especially in the area of health; which has led to violation of their reproductive rights.

Roma women have difficulties especially in entering the labor market.

Disabled women are supposed to be able to access personal assistant services [among many other social services], supplied by the government but these are selectively implemented by municipal authorities based on their budget allocations, that do not reflect concern for this group of women.

Now I will give the floor to my colleague Ms. Leena Ruusuvaori.

4. Sexual minority women

While the de jure standards of law in Finland do not allow for discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, discrimination remains a reality for sexual minorities. In fact, the present government report does not recognize or address their rights.

The family law, while allowing for registration of partnerships between same sex couples does not accord the same rights in relation to guardianship, custody and inheritance.

We strongly urge the Anti-discriminatory Committee to keep its mandate and direct the government to ensure that there is equality for all women in Finland and that discrimination must be prohibited on all grounds.

5. Employment and reconciliation of work and family life

Women are in a vicious circle when it comes to employment situations and reconciliation of work and family life. Women are in lower paid jobs or receive less pay for equal work compared to men. Because of their lower salaries, it is women who most frequently take parental leaves. This absence from the labor market in turn leads to lower salaries, pensions and fixed-term employment contracts.

Sex role stereotyping is not adequately addressed by the State. There is legislation and policies to promote involvement of fathers in child rearing and household duties through for example parental leave but this is rarely used and women continue to be burdened by these roles.

For more than 20 years a policy has been in place to address the lack of women in specific fields of employment. However it has had little impact also given that the policy has not looked to change sex stereotypes in job segregation. And further that equal value has not been accorded to sectors which women have been involved.

6. Situation of girls: health, education and stereotyping

The school curriculum and teacher's training is not designed to modify traditional sex roles. Due to lack of long lasting and comprehensive studies on educational methods, girls' academic attainment is deteriorating from lack of positive reinforcement by the educational system which creates preferential treatment for boys. Further, sexual harassment in schools and in public places together with stereotyped model of woman portrayed in media compound the vulnerabilities faced by girls including contributing to a high level of mental health problems. In addition, the resource allocation for the school health care system handicaps their ability to deal with these issues.

I thank you Madam Chair and members of the Committee for your attention and commitment for women's rights.