

**100 Years of Women's Civil Rights
International Conference at Harpa**

**Current Threats to Women's Civil Rights
Closing Session: Towards Full Human Rights of Women**

**Address by H.E. Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson,
the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland**

23 October 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a pleasure for me to be given the opportunity to participate in the celebration of 100 years of women's civil rights by saying a few words today.
- First of all, I want to congratulate the organizers for this very important event and creating a visible milestone in Iceland's continued efforts to promote gender equality, both at home and on the international scene.
- As you have probably heard already for these last two days, Iceland has for some time been in the fortunate position to be at the top of the Global Gender Gap Index. At the same time we must realize that the quest for overcoming gender inequality is not over, we still have to address a number of persistent challenges such as the pay gap, domestic violence and gender-based discrimination which often rests on a male-dominated discourse and mindset.
- Being at the top of the Gender Gap Index does not only put our own challenges in context, it also highlights our responsibility to continued efforts to achieve gender equality and hopefully inspire other countries to do the same. In this context, Gender equality has become a fundamental and cross-cutting theme in Iceland's foreign policy.
- The Ministry for Foreign Affairs is highly engaged in this field and in our work we emphasise gender equality in all fields, whether it is Development Cooperation, Security and Defence, Arctic Cooperation and so on.
- I am very proud that our Prime Minister was earlier this year designated by UN Women to join a group of 10 Heads of State and Government that

have been selected to be IMPACT Champions of the HeforShe Movement.

- This is an important recognition of our continued efforts and we are deeply devoted to advancing this work through our IMPACT commitments which are: to close the gender pay gap by 2022, to achieve gender parity in media by 2020, and last but not least; to engage one in five Icelandic men to be a HeforShe.
- (*Madame Phumzile, you can count on us!*)

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Gender equality is an issue for all society. It's not a women's issue alone, and it certainly is not a men's issue alone. If some individuals are excluded it is not only those individuals who lose, the whole of society loses out. If half the population is excluded, then the loss to society is enormous.
- We have persistent challenges that need to be overcome both in Iceland and abroad.
- In the economy we are faced with much too low female participation on the labor market. There are too few women in top-managerial jobs. We have an unexplained (and totally unjustifiable) pay-gap between men and women. In turn, this unexplained pay-gap then translates into unequal pensions once people reach retirement age.
- Looking further way, in many parts of the world, girls and boys do not have the same access to health and education. And throughout the world,

both the developed world and the developing world, we see systematic gender based violence.

- It is a sad fact that most of us have a relative or a friend that has been subjected to gender based violence. The figures are staggering. UN Women says that 1 in 3 women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner. In the EU countries around 50 percent of women have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15.
- Looking closer to home I want to mention tools we have adopted in Iceland to address domestic violence. Those are restriction orders as well as the possibility of removing the perpetrator from the home. These tools can be effective in fighting domestic violence and are beneficial for the victims, who are usually women and children, who suffer domestic violence at the hands of the „man of the house“ , quote – unquote.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It goes without saying that men cannot be absent from this debate. I have said before that men are part of the problem. But we are also part of the solution.
- And that brings me to what it means to be a man and the necessity for men to become engaged in the fight for gender equality, not the least in the fight against violence against women.
- It is with this in mind that we are emphasising the role of men and boys and gender equality in our foreign policy, using such tools as the HeForShe campaign as well as the Barbershop concept which we intend to promote in major international organisations that Iceland is a member

of. By doing that we hope to generate awareness and responsibility among men, not least opinion leaders, in fighting for gender equality.

- Before closing I want to acknowledge how happy we are to have Madame Phumzile, the Executive Director of UN Women with us here today. UN Women will continue to play a crucial role in the struggle for gender equality and through our cooperation we intend to participate in that struggle with them.

Thank you.