

**Multi-stakeholder Forum, 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2018.**

**Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.**

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Sven Jürgenson, Permanent Representative of Estonia to UN**

Thank you. I am very pleased to be here today and discuss this important issue with such a broad range of distinguished delegates and civil society representatives.

Rural women and girls are equally active contributors to economic growth as well as to social and political change. However, they still face inequalities and forms of discrimination and stereotyping. While this appertains to the overarching topic of women's rights as a whole, there are circumstances that shape the struggle specifically for rural women and girls. I hereby welcome the report of the Secretary General on challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. I would like to offer Estonia's full support to this, especially in regards to facilitating the access of rural women to the workforce and ensuring full participation in quality education by expanding the scope of ICT.

It is in the field of education that the rapid development of digitalization can bring much positive effect. It gives the possibility to offer classes online, reach bigger audiences and connect with women and girls in rural areas or in places of conflict, where access to information is not available. Women and girls who have access to the Internet and the skills to use it, will learn about their own human rights, take part in networking and cultivate their business, marketing and management skills, that will encourage entrepreneurship. This boosts economy and improves overall welfare, thus, the community benefits as a whole.

Estonia has taken upon itself to spread the knowledge and possibilities that ICT brings to education : I would like to shortly mention a couple of development projects, that we are collaboratively involved with.

- Estonia is currently supporting IT-education in eastern Ukraine with a focus on women's entrepreneurship. The goal of this project is to enhance the employment opportunities and to support the subsistence of vulnerable groups in eastern Ukraine. There will be IT-training centres founded, where eight 4-month long training sessions will take place in the timeframe of two years.
- We are also supporting a project in Moldova that aims to benefit communities by raising the skills and competencies of women and youth in the field of rural event and hospitality service. To achieve this, handbooks are created, seminars are held, trips are made and mentorships are offered by academics and specialists in this field.
- Estonia has been funding projects with a primary goal of supporting the economic livelihood of rural women in Ghana and Kenya. Professional networking links improve marketing and business management skills of the local women hence empowering their communities.
- Estonia funded the Girls School Education Program in the Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan, which provided opportunities of quality education to orphans, children of labour, internally displaced persons and persons with disabilities. The project brought positive change to the community and once again reinforced the importance of quality education for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The course of these development projects already reflect a high demand for ICT to be used for achieving numerous goals. Therefore consistent support and commitment is needed to increase the utilization of ICT as a key tool to delivering information, education and knowledge to rural women and girls.

Thank you.