

## Global Leaders Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

### Progress on Cyprus' commitments

In 2014, the President of the Republic appointed for the first time, a Commissioner for Gender Equality, aiming at promoting further gender equality issues and women's rights in Cyprus.

2. Her duties and responsibilities are among others to: (a) promote equality between men and women and the elimination of discrimination against women, (b) preside over and coordinate the work of the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR), (c) monitor the implementation of policies and measures promoting equality between men and women, (d) submit proposals/recommendations for the legislative safeguarding of equality and the elimination of discrimination in the legislation, (e) submit proposals/recommendations for the promotion and implementation of policy measures in the field of gender equality, (f) evaluate the results of the implementation of laws and policy measures in the field of gender equality, (g) oversee data collection and the preparation of studies and research on issues relating to gender equality, (h) organize sensitization campaigns to inform the public and especially women about their rights, (i) utilize European programs in the field of gender equality, (j) participate in international conferences on gender equality etc.

3. Since her appointment, the Commissioner for Gender Equality has been working with the Council of the NMWR, in order to strengthen the NMWR, in collaboration with the women's organizations which are members of the Council putting forward their views and suggestions.

4. Also, in the framework of the NMWR, six Committees have been established (Committee on Equal Participation between Women and Men in Public and Political Life, Committee on Violence Against Women and Trafficking in Human Beings, Committee on European Relations, Committee on Employment and Economic Empowerment of Women, Committee on Eliminating Gender Stereotypes and Committee on Bi-Communal Co-operation), aiming at implementing actions included in the Strategic Plan on Gender Equality 2014-2017, as well as promoting further gender equality issues in Cyprus.

5. In the field of balanced participation of women and men in decision-making positions in public and political life various measures have been taken, such as awareness-raising campaigns with the broad participation of women's

organizations, meetings and contacts with political parties and media organizations, dissemination of statistical data and research findings and exchange of good practices through conferences and seminars.

6. As a result, the participation of women in the House of Representatives has increased from 10.7% to 17.85%, -with three women chairing each a Parliamentary Committee-, during the last Parliamentary Elections (May 2016).

7. It is also worthwhile noting that women appear in high ranking independent positions in Cyprus, such as Governor of the Central Bank, Accountant-General, Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights, Law Commissioner and Commissioner for Children's Rights. Further, the President of the Republic has appointed a woman as Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance and a woman as Commissioner for the Environment.

8. Significant to note is also the appointment of women as Chairpersons of the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Commission for the Protection of Competition and the Board of the Natural Gas Public Company (DEFA).

9. Women were also appointed as Chairpersons on the boards of the following semi-government organisations: Cyprus Telecommunications Authority, the Board of Loan Commissioners, the Cyprus Forest Industries, the Cyprus Standardisation Organisation, the Tenders Review Authority, the Tax Council and Vice- Chairpersons in the Boards of the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation, the Housing Finance Corporation and the Council for Registration and Control of Building and Civil Engineering Contractors.

10. The Gender Equality Unit of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order prepared the new Strategic Plan on Equality between Women and Men 2014-2017, in close collaboration with all government departments, women's organizations and other NGOs, academic institutions and human rights bodies.

11. The Strategic Plan on Equality between Women and Men, which covers the following priority areas: a) institutional reform for the effective implementation of gender equality, b) law reform/improvement of the legislative framework, c) Balanced participation of women and men in public and political life, d) Combating all forms of violence against women, e) Economic empowerment of women, and f) Elimination of gender stereotypes, has been widely distributed to all Ministries, Government Departments, Equality Bodies, Women's Organisations, NGOs, Local Authorities and the House of Representatives, in order to contribute to its implementation.

12. In the framework of Strategic Plan's implementation, awareness-raising campaigns have been implemented to encourage women to report incidents of violence and to sensitize professionals and the public. In April 2016, the Ministry

of Justice and Public Order, in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy in Cyprus, as well as the Advisory Committee on the Prevention and Combating of Family Violence have launched an educational seminar, entitled «Violence Against Women», aiming at sensitizing professionals on the issue.

13. In line with the Istanbul Convention the Law Office of the Republic of Cyprus, in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and Public Order has prepared a bill, aiming at the criminalization of *harassment* and *stalking*, in line with Article 34 of the Istanbul Convention. The bill is expected to be sent to the Council of Ministers for approval before the end of September 2016 and to be submitted to the House of Representatives immediately thereafter.

14. Additionally, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order/Gender Equality Unit is assessing the results of the two studies prepared by an external partner on the changes that need to be made to the legislative framework of Cyprus, in order to comply with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, as well as on *Assessment and Risk Management*, according to Article 51 of the Convention.

15. The modernization of family law has been among the priorities of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, and to this end the Ministry has established a) an expert group composed of judges, lawyers and representatives of the Office of the Commissioner for the Protection of Children's Rights and b) a group of University professors, aiming at assessing the family law legislation in order for it to be reviewed and adapted accordingly.

16. At present the two groups have submitted their proposals, which are being elaborated/ consolidated by the Gender Equality Unit of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order.

17. Also, in this context, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order has also prepared a bill entitled "The Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution Law of 2015", which provides that the family courts, which hear divorce cases by a tripartite group of judges will now hear divorce cases under a single Judge. The bill, which is expected to significantly accelerate judicial proceedings, is at present before the Parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs of the House of Representatives.

18. Additionally, in view of the preparation of the 8<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report of Cyprus on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which will be submitted to the United Nations in March 2017, the Gender Equality Unit has begun the collection of data/information from all Ministries/Agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations and other bodies.

19. Furthermore, the Gender Equality Unit has begun the collection of data/information from all Ministries/Agencies, Equality Bodies, Non-Governmental Organizations, Local Authorities and other stakeholders, in order to ascertain the degree of implementation of the various actions included in the Strategic Action Plan on Equality between Men and Women.

20. At the same time, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order/National Machinery for Women's Rights continues to support and subsidize organizations and other bodies towards the implementation of actions that promote equality between women and men.

15 September 2016