

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-eighth session
10 – 21 March 2014
New York

INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the
Millennium Development Goals for women and girls**

**Focus: Accountability and participation of women and girls
in the implementation of the MDGs**

Wednesday, March 12, 2014, 3:00 - 6:00 pm

Financing for gender equality*

by

H. E. Mr. Urmas Paet
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Republic of Estonia

*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Excellences, distinguished members of delegations and civil society, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this Fifty-Eighth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women I would like to welcome you all to this panel discussion on accountability and the participation of women and girls in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. In my presentation I will elaborate on the more specific topic of financing for gender equality.

At the outset, allow me to remind you of two very important upcoming anniversaries. This year we have reached the 20th anniversary of the Cairo Programme of Action on population and development, and next year we have the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, which is another important milestone in the agenda for women's empowerment. We are also approaching the 2005 World Summit's Millennium Development Goals' target year of 2015 and we should evaluate what has been achieved in this regard. At the same time, we should admit that there is much more to be done in the upcoming years in regards to the post-2015 agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Gender equality is a goal that can only be achieved with a good toolbox. In order to have such a toolbox, we need responsible policymaking and educated decisions combined with efficient global cooperation and joint efforts. Only then we can develop a toolbox, which helps us to create a solid basis to enhance the full enjoyment of all human rights by women and girls, enhance access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, access to education, contribute to family planning and empower women and girls, tackle violence against women and girls, including domestic violence and violence in armed conflicts, to fight against impunity and create rehabilitation networks for victims. To be clear – Estonia stands firmly in support of all those issues and continues to enhance its contribution world-wide.

Nevertheless, as there are 20th anniversaries approaching, it is timely to analyse our achievements in developing this toolbox. It is clear that success in the areas I mentioned beforehand depends on the commitment of all stakeholders: governments, international organizations, non-governmental actors, private businesses and every single person among us.

When we consider the progress towards achieving MDGs and also future sustainable development goals, the main responsibility should lie with the nation states and their governments. Often progress towards fulfilling goals is not even a question of financial resources, but a question of policies. The effectiveness of the international community's support and effectiveness of official development assistance is much higher in those partner countries, where the public institutions are capable, transparent and accountable, and where adequate policies are in place and implemented. The support from Estonia and our fellow EU member states remains significant, since currently the EU contributes more than half of the official development assistance worldwide. Estonia and other EU member states have on many occasions reaffirmed their individual and collective official development assistance commitments, showing special attention to the needs of least developed countries and also underlining the need to enhance aid effectiveness and transparency.

As I already mentioned, gender equality is a tool and it only works if we use it. Therefore, gender equality markers should be used in policy-making, project proposals and their financing processes. Thus, gender should be mainstreamed into every policymaking and funding decision. Specific measures are of utmost importance, but a wider shift in a global society and in people's minds can only be achieved if using the so-called "gender lens". Seeing gender in all fields that engage people and through that seeing issues that need to be addressed, will help us to achieve the MDG-s, that cover a wide area of utmost critical aspects. This can be done if everybody - all fields, policies and decision makers work together towards a mutual goal.

It is also essential to make good use of strong public-private and non-governmental partnerships. Thereby I would like to give special attention to the initiatives related to education. I would like to give special attention to the initiatives related to education. Welcoming the Secretary General's Global Education First Initiative, we have noticed and applaud the contributions and pledges by the private sector. Microsoft, Nestlé, Mastercard and many other partners around the world are making commitments to achieve the targets of the Initiative. For the launch of the initiative, dozens of companies and private foundations have made pledges mobilizing over \$1.5 billion to ensure all children in the world have equal access to quality, relevant and transformative education. Complementing those efforts, numerous members of civil society have also joined the effort to guide various actions to enhance women's human rights and participation in our societies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We make good use of strong public-private and non-governmental partnerships. As the quantitative contribution has increased, we also need to increase the quality of actors in the field. Actors in the field are those who make this quantitative increase of resources into qualitative change. The question is – has the qualitative content improved? And here I ask – why do we talk about the same issues today, as we did 20 years ago? Why do we stand where we stand today in terms of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals? For example, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action addressed in para 37, quote: "*Ensure also the success of the Platform for Action in countries with economies in transition...*". Looking at the list of the Human Development Index ranking nations, we still see the same countries at the bottom of the ranking and sadly we are witness to the fact, that the actual gap between the developed and developing countries in widening.

Dear friends,

Here, again, I would like to come back to the topic of education. There is no future without education for all. No matter how much resources we invest in societies, there is no development, if it is not supported by education.

However, in order to have sustainable and prosperous societies we must build on the efforts completed so far and continue with education for all, including in higher levels of education. For example education and professional skill development help to bring an end to forced child marriages and cheap child labour.

Education is crucial for ending poverty, contributing to social integration and full employment. On the subject of empowerment, studies on education present a connection between the years spent in school and the average wages earned later on. Those studies prove that for every year of primary education, a girl's earnings increase by 5 to 15 per cent. Just one additional year of secondary schooling boosts girls' future earning potential by 15-25 percent. In 2012 the World Bank found that eliminating discrimination against women in the workplace could boost worker productivity by up to 40%. Microsoft rightly pointed out last year, that while everyone is watching the economic potential of so-called emerging BRIC economies, the most challenging new emerging market in the world may well be the women and their capability to generate economic value and social growth.

We must contribute more to this all-inclusive and people-centred approach where everybody has the right and the possibilities to realize his/her dreams, aspirations and capabilities. The sustainable development goals must address these thoughts with forward-looking courage.

Supporting education and especially education for girls and women has also been and remains an important component of Estonian bi-lateral development assistance programs. Estonia has supported projects contributing to the quality of and access to education in countries like Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus, but also in Yemen and Afghanistan. Besides projects to support general education, we have also supported vocational training and entrepreneurship education for women, as entrepreneurship remains one of the most important ways out from poverty.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We shall take full advantage of the technological developments of the 21st century that create enormous possibilities to empower people, enable people to participate in decision making processes and enhance their living conditions. For example, a more extensive use of technological achievements could be the way out of the fossil energy trap for developing countries, as well as the only way towards sustainable societies.

Broader use of information and communications technology, bridging the digital divide and Internet freedom are at the heart of a new and sustainable global society. This is the case in various situations. Firstly, information technology is the engine of a new economy; it generates entrepreneurship, includes the possibility of new jobs and serves as a gateway to unlimited knowledge. Secondly, if we contribute to the spread of information technology, we also increase the likelihood and extent of access to education. A better education, in turn, leads to more entrepreneurship and a more equal distribution of resources, contributing to the advancement of girls and women's rights and gender equality.

Dear friends,

With this in mind, I would like to give you some insight as a representative of a small and responsible country. Firstly, Estonia has increased its contribution to the realm of sustainable development, democracy and rule of law, as we regard these to be preconditions for gender mainstreaming into all societal spheres.

In Estonia, we have a comprehensive Development Plan for Reducing Violence (2010–2014), which lays out concrete activities on how to reduce and prevent violence in its various forms, including domestic violence, violence against minors, trafficking in human beings, and violence against women and children. On the justice system side, we have Guidelines for the Development of Criminal Policy until 2018, which provide that Estonia must have a sufficient number of shelters for victims of criminal offences, including victims of domestic violence and trafficking. In addition, Estonia has a National Action Plan for the implementation of the Security Council resolution 1325 with the goal of defining and systematizing our activities in the field of international peace missions and development cooperation.

To contribute to these topics internationally, Estonia supports these priorities within development aid and focuses on education and health as basic criteria to move forward. We focus on the information technology toolkit, as it is definitely the tool of the 21st century with which to enhance the empowerment of women and girls. With that aim, we hosted a respective side event this morning, addressing ICT and Internet as powerful tools for advancing the rights and empowerment of women and girls, together with Botswana, Mongolia and the UNDP. Not less importantly, to enhance the position of women in society, we are making efforts within the Human Rights Council which we are members of; and within the Commission on the Status of Women, where we will begin our bureau membership following this session.

Dear friends,

Building on that elaboration, I have the following notifications for our discussion and possible future action:

1. The cooperation between various authorities at the international and national level continues to be a need and a challenge. In terms of partnerships and dialogues, we need to focus on goals that are realistic and implementable.
2. Estonia is a strong promoter of progress indicators which help us to evaluate our action impact, changes achieved as well as trends. As qualitative change needs more time to be evaluated, we sometimes take the easy route with quantitative indicators to show the immediate effects of our actions. More attention to change and development shall be given.
3. A tailor-made approach shall be applied to achieve balanced economic, political and social development. It should be enforced by a strong sense of national ownership. Local leaders must take on the responsibility. The international community can support them, and we continue to do so as well.
4. Action needs resources and good results can be achieved when both the public and private sector contribute. With effective donor coordination, sometimes very little additional resources are required to implement the objectives set out in the Action Plans on a much larger scale.
5. The twinning network of partner countries, wherein a donor country could support a partner country to develop its implementation capacities should be broadened. For example, within the UNSCR 1325 network, we have about 40 countries with NAP – it should be easy to reach double this number.
6. Full use should be made of 21st century tools like the ICT and Internet to increase participation and empowerment of women and girls in our societies. There are many positive

examples from around the world regarding how women have successfully used social media and online news platforms to various ends to enhance their living conditions: rallying support for reforms in the legal systems of states, gaining access to markets to expand economic opportunities, engaging constituencies to promote women's participation and monitoring incidents to enhance safety. Bridging the digital divide is essential to achieve sustainable global society.

7. Information technology is also an engine for renewed economy. It generates entrepreneurship, contains the possibility of new jobs and serves as a gateway to unlimited knowledge. Secondly, if we contribute to the spread of information technology, we also increase the likelihood and extent of access to education. A better education, in turn, leads to more entrepreneurship.
8. Qualitative change is not only about addressing women and girls. It is also about men and boys. Suppression of women and girls, sexual and gender-based violence, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, early and forced marriages – all these must remain in the past and men and boys have an important role to play in achieving this.
9. I would also like to note that legal restrictions on sexual orientation and gender identity must be removed and sexual and reproductive health and rights must be recognized and promoted. I firmly believe that no culture or religion should be used as an excuse for violence against women and girls or for treating women and girls as subordinate members of society.
10. I consider it to be of utmost importance that sustainable development goals will continue, now more through a human rights based approach, towards goals we set with the MDG's. The SDG-s must be clearly defined with implementable and measurable goals and covered with sufficient resources.
11. Education shall be on the frontline of attention and contributions as there is no future without education for all. Sustainable development goals must address post-primary education levels with forward-looking courage.

To conclude - it might seem to you that I barely touched on the topic of financing for gender equality. However, my aim was to reflect the topics of utmost importance, namely how to wisely spend the quantitative increase of our resources and to achieve qualitative change. Because that is what we shall be looking for.

I thank you, and I wish us a lively continuation of the discussion.