



**The Permanent Mission of Iceland
to the United Nations**

**Statement by
H.E. Ambassador Gunnar Pálsson
Permanent Representative**

55th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

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The Permanent Mission of Ireland
to the United Nations

Statement by
M.E. Aghazadeh, Deputy Permanent
Representative

at the 50th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

12 February 2001

Irish Government

www.ireland.org/mission

The theme of this year's session of the CGW is fundamentally the quest for gender equality. Fortunately, educational opportunities have improved, generally speaking, in the last decades. The enrollment of girls and women in schools and educational programs has steadily increased, although worrying gaps remain, especially as regards access to post-primary education. Unsurprisingly, gender issues, including increased participation of women in all areas of education, training, science and technology, will advance women's rights, contribute to a better and a more just society, as well as accelerating economic growth and social development.

In recent times, my country has made substantial progress on gender equality. Iceland's government is led by a woman and women represent around 41% of cabinet ministers, parliamentarians and local government representatives. As a result of these and other positive changes, Iceland has topped the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index for the last two years.

Progress in areas of politics, education and health notwithstanding, Iceland's women still lag behind men in economic terms. In view of this year's theme, it is a pertinent question why a higher level of education does not translate into higher wages for women. Two thirds of Icelandic University graduates are women, yet the gender pay gap, measured in 2008 at 16%, persists and women hold fewer leadership positions than men. Bridging the gender pay gap through better implementation is now seen as a priority.

To correct this imbalance, the Icelandic government has adopted legislation to facilitate women's advancement in the economic arena. A gender quota of 40% has been set for board members and managers with 500 employees or more. All public companies three years to reach this objective. Furthermore, companies with 25 employees or more are expected to include gender equality data in their annual reports.

Iceland's government is determined to fight domestic and sexual violence. Consistent with its action plan for 2006-2009, a review for the period 2007-2009 will place special emphasis on examining gender-biased acts of violence, their prosecution and handling in the judicial system. The aim is to ensure that a bigger proportion of cases of this nature reaches the courts. As an example of the public interest in the campaign against violence and the sexual abuse of women, a group of 27 civil organizations organized an international conference on the theme last year on the 55th anniversary of Women's Day, the first major political rally of women in Iceland. The main speaker was Ms. Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women. More than 1000 people gathered at the conference, and the streets in Reykjavik saw their support.

Iceland has criminalized the purchase of sexual services and has thereby joined Sweden and Norway in defining prostitution as a form of violence against women that must be eliminated. Iceland has furthermore criminalized the degrading of

