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56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Agenda Item 5A

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State Secretary of the Ministry Foreign Affairs

Chair, Ministers, fellow delegates,

After three days and dozens of speeches, statements and side events, an engaging, lively and clear:

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are preconditions for sustainable development and should be at the heart of policy making.

As we prepare to go to Rio in June, we should remember that women all over the world will scrutinize every move we make – and how we perform there!

Rural women, not least in the world's developing countries, are the first to suffer from economic stagnation, social injustice and environmental degradation.

This is not only a disgrace and a violation of their basic rights, but also a denial of their freedom, time and opportunity to fully participate in economic and social life.

Rural women's lack of access to natural resources, basic services and productive assets is also a destructive barrier to economic growth and sustainable development at the national and global level.

20 years after the Earth Summit in Rio and 17 years after the Women's Conference in Beijing, we know very well what needs to be done.

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I will highlight three points:

First, to all my fellow citizens and to the people of the world, I would like to say that the right to the highest attainable standard of health, sexual and reproductive health and rights are particularly important.

Millions of women and girls do not have the freedom to control their own reproduction, nor do they have access to basic reproductive health services.

As a consequence, 1.4 million women die because of unsafe abortions. We also know that preventable deaths and complications take place in countries where abortion is illegal.

By setting these standards, we are removing some of the most important obstacles to millions of women's access to education and employment, economic and political freedom.

My second point number two:

We must take effective measures to enable women to participate fully in economic life. This will include ensuring their equal rights to education, economic resources, including credit, land, water, energy, technology and decent work.

Such measures will require legislative, judicial and administrative reform and enforcement. In some cases, this may require affirmative action, including gender quotas.

Which brings me to my third point:

It is not enough to have a legislative or policy framework. We must take effective action to ensure women's rights to participate fully in political and social decision-making at the local, national, regional and global levels. This is particularly relevant to women's rights in the context of the global transition.

Women's rights should be enshrined in constitutions and ensured by legislative action and enforcement.

Chair, fellow delegates,

Women's rights have been known for decades – why doesn't happen?
I prefer not say, just to put it bluntly, we all know the answer to this question as well:

It would require a change of mind-set and a willingness to change priorities – among the rich and powerful, the elites, around the world.

And as we know, the rich and powerful – the decision-makers around the world are mostly men, in particular middle aged men.



This brings me to my final point:

It is crucial for our success that we actively reach out and mobilize men and boys for gender equality and women's empowerment.

So I chose to close my remarks by this direct appeal to you and your colleagues around the world:

Stop promoting the short-term fix of military spending during the next budget cycle.
Your first test will be in Doha in four months!

Thank you.

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