



The Permanent Mission of Iceland to the United Nations

**Statement by
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to the United Nations**

**on behalf of the Nordic Countries
Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden**

**Informal Consultations on
United Nations System-wide Coherence
- Gender -**

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Messieurs Co-Chairs,

I have the pleasure to take the floor on behalf of the five Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women is a high priority to the Nordic countries, and we thank the co-chairs for giving specific attention to this important matter during our informal consultations. The fundamental purpose of the UN's work in development should be to support positive outcomes and results in programme countries. With that in mind, we particularly appreciate that the focus of today's meeting is on delivering at the country level.

Messieurs Co-Chairs,

The strong link between gender equality and women's empowerment and the fundamental goals of the UN - development, human rights, peace and security - is undisputed. The UN has a central role in assisting Member States in their efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women, thereby helping them to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Mainstreaming gender throughout the UN's policies and programmes is therefore of utmost importance. Equally important is the UN's assistance with putting in place nationally-owned and gender-specific programs at the country level.

In recent years there have been good examples of the UN system strengthening its support to national governments' efforts to advance gender equality and empower women, and this is encouraging.

However, too often – and especially at the country level – we hear that the UN has inadequate capacity, coordination and resources to be able to respond effectively to Governments' needs. This has been reported to the General Assembly, ECOSOC and its functional commissions, as well as in many evaluations conducted, most recently in UNDP and UNICEF. Accordingly, considerable challenges remain, and it seems clear that much needs to be done to ensure that UN's assistance in the advancement of gender-equality and women's empowerment reaches its full potential.

An important challenge repeatedly identified is limited cooperation and scant joint programming at the country-level. This insufficient cooperation and coherence increases transaction costs for Governments, which in order to secure support from multiple entities have to spread thin in their relations with the UN. This can have particularly negative consequences when the aim is to assist in the mainstreaming of gender equality into national poverty reduction strategies.

Another serious challenge is the lack of leadership. There is a risk that by making everyone responsible for gender mainstreaming, nobody can be held accountable for actual implementation at the country level. This lack of accountability may also translate into the UN not being adequately focused on supporting national priorities on gender equality.

A third challenge, which is closely related to lack of coherence and leadership, has been to secure that resource allocation to gender programmes and mainstreaming matches commitments, and that the availability of resources are commensurate with the needs at the country-level. As adequate funding is a necessary precondition for results at the country level, this is a serious challenge.

Messieurs Co-Chairs

The combined result of these deficiencies is that the United Nations is not being sufficiently capable of supporting Member States in their national efforts in the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. This is a cause for concern and a strong indication that a unified approach to supporting gender equality is needed. More specifically, we need an approach that builds on the comparative advantage of each part of the system, reduces transaction costs, and increases the quality and level of assistance offered by the UN.

Going forward, we believe it will be important for this intergovernmental process to get input from UN actors working at the country level, as well as from partner countries, on their experience of the UN's work in this field. One idea would be to convene an interactive panel discussion on this issue, focusing on delivery and results on the ground.

Moreover, and as we have indicated before, we encourage the Secretary-General to present the membership with concrete proposals for action in this regard. Such a proposal should elaborate on shortcomings in the UN's capacity in the area of gender, specifically by identifying gaps in programme delivery at the country level, and it should include recommendations on how to address those shortcomings.

Messieurs Co-Chairs

One of our common objectives, as Member States must be to strengthen the capacity, accountability and effectiveness of the UN's work in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. We attach great importance to our informal consultations here today, and hope that they will bring us closer to this common objective.

Thank you Messieurs Co-Chairs