



Permanent mission of Belgium to the United Nations in New York

**59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) – Beijing
+20
General Debate
Intervention of Belgium**

Dear Madam Chair, distinguished representatives, ladies and gentlemen,

First of all I want to declare that my delegation fully aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

This twentieth anniversary gives us the opportunity to assess, to analyze progress made and challenges remaining... but mainly time to act.

We, as governments, are responsible for achieving gender equality and for the empowerment of women and girls through the full and accelerated implementation of all critical areas of concern in the Beijing documents. The commitments are clear, but now legislation, programs, plans and effective means of implementation are required.

Urgent action is needed to promote and protect women's and girls' human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are universal and inalienable. No tradition, no religion, no value, nor any custom or culture can ever justify gender discrimination, violence against women and girls, or violations of their rights. This includes full access to sexual, reproductive health rights and services. Such access implies the availability of confidential sexual and reproductive health information as well as comprehensive sexual education. In Belgium, all contraceptives are completely or partially reimbursed.

Belgium has also committed to take effective measures to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that affect women and girls. We have strengthened our antidiscrimination laws by introducing specific provisions on discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. Homophobia and transphobia are also considered an aggravating circumstance in cases of hate crimes. Campaigns against hate and discrimination in schools, media, and youth movements, by governmental instances as well as by civil society are the groundwork for an open, tolerant and LGBTIQ friendly society.

Madam Chair,

Violence against women and girls is one of the worst violations of women's rights and causes intolerable suffering. For several years, Belgium has made good on its commitment to combat gender-based violence through a national action plan that involves all levels of governance. The new national plan will be adopted in 2015 under the terms of the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It should focus on violence between partners, female genital mutilation,

forced marriages and honor-related violence. In addition, it will integrate new measures into fight sexual violence.

Belgium aims to continue to implement a holistic, coordinated and multidisciplinary strategy that ensures that all the agencies - whether they are medical, social, police or judicial - , work together to get results. To build up and evaluate its policy, Belgium collaborates with all stakeholders including NGO's.

Madam Chair,

Gender equality is not only a human rights issue. It is also an issue that can resort positive economic effects. We must continue to pay maximum attention to employment policies' gender dimension. The fight against the wage gap is of fundamental value. We must implement policies that allow reconciliation of private and professional lives, in particular by offering quality, affordable care services for children and dependants.

Action is also required to ensure the efficiency of gender mainstreaming. Here, we must not forget that policies require adequate resources in order to be effective. In recent years, this strategy has been widely adopted at all levels of government in Belgium, sometimes through legislation. Political commitment is essential. Strategies are designed to ensure that all competent ministers meet their responsibilities by setting practical targets, implementing action plans subject to parliamentary assessment. The development of statistics disaggregated by sex and gender indicators is crucial in that respect.

Empowerment of women is a key element in the Beijing platform. In Belgium, the benefits of gender quotas or parity laws need no longer to be demonstrated: women representatives make up 41.5% of all assemblies since the 2014 elections.

Madam Chair,

Last year, Belgian law adopted sexism as a criminal offence. But legislation is not enough. It is essential that we raise the awareness of the general public, particularly amongst youth, regarding the need to reach effective gender equality in our society. Through their educational policies, Belgium's three linguistic Communities have developed specific media- and educational campaigns in order to fight gender stereotypes. These are included in textbooks and other (on-line) course materials as well as reflected through the continued training of teachers.

2015 also celebrates the 15th Anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. With the adoption of its second national action plan on the application of this Resolution, Belgium upholds its commitment to promote the participation of women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and to protect women and girls against violence.

Finally, concerning the new Post-2015 framework, Belgium wishes to emphasize the importance of a strong gender dimension in the transformative post-2015 development agenda and reaffirms to that extent its attachment to the OWG (open working group) proposal on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls and the structural integration of a gender perspective in all the other goals and targets, with appropriate gender disaggregated indicators in order to measure whether the proposed objectives are met for both women and men.

It's time to act for de facto gender equality. Thank you for your attention.