



IRELAND

Statement by

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Madam Chair, distinguished delegates,

I would like to thank you Madame Chair and UN Women for ensuring that the 59th CSW is a successful event. Ireland associates itself with the Statement made on behalf of the European Union.

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the critical contribution made worldwide by civil society. In the past few days I have met with and heard from many civil society activists and women human rights defenders. I have been struck by – indeed, inspired by - the energy, the tenacity and the courage they show in their work to protect and promote the human rights of women and girls.

As we gather to mark the 20th anniversary of Beijing, we must examine both the progress made, and the distance left to travel, to achieve the goal of full gender equality.

In Ireland, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action gave significant impetus to a period of sustained public focus on gender equality. We introduced laws to prohibit discrimination on gender and other grounds, and we continue to provide the infrastructure to support this. We have established new dedicated Government offices to address domestic violence, sexual and gender-based violence and human trafficking. We put in place the Irish National Women's Strategy, to address key themes for empowerment outlined in Beijing and to ensure systemic positive action towards gender equality. And last year, we established a strong Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

Since Beijing, female employment in Ireland has risen by 50% and women now account for over 45% of our workforce. Still, we need to do more to facilitate women in accessing paid employment, for instance through the provision of more good quality, affordable childcare.

The educational attainment of women now surpasses that of men throughout the working age population. Women continue to make inroads into previously male-dominated professions and into senior levels in business. Further action is needed, however, to encourage greater participation of girls and young women in science and technology and, more generally, to address segregation in the labour market.

Further action is also required in the political sphere, where only 16% of the seats in Ireland's Lower House of Parliament are held by women. In order to address this, we enacted legislation in 2012 linking State funding for political parties to a condition that at least 30% of their candidates are women.

Madam Chair,

On the global scale, while much has been achieved in the realization of women's rights, the gains have been too slow and uneven. Gender based violence, the denial

of education, and early and forced marriage remain a deplorable scourge in many societies and represent serious obstacles to development.

Ireland is committed, in our foreign policy and through our development cooperation programme, to the promotion of gender equality, the elimination of violence, and the realization of the human rights of women and girls. As a member of the UN Human Rights Council for the term 2013-2015, Ireland has prioritised efforts to address these concerns. In January 2015, we launched our second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

This year is a landmark year for development. Ireland is honoured to have our Ambassador to the UN, together with his Kenyan counterpart, serve as co-facilitator of the final intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda. The task facing all Member States is to develop a transformative agenda that places gender equality front and centre and where no one is left behind.

In addition, this unique year of opportunity must see gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls fully reflected in the outcomes of the Sendai Conference on disaster risk reduction, the Addis Conference on Financing for Development, and December's Climate Conference.

We are very proud that the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, was recently chosen to be one of ten Champion World Leaders of the HeForShe campaign. In doing so, the President observed that "Gender equality is the prize not the gift."

In that spirit, I call on all States to engage fully in pursuing the goal of gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and the realization of their human rights. Let us seize this opportunity to claim the prize and to challenge and dismantle the structures that perpetuate discrimination against women.

Thank you.