

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
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Working session 3: Tolerance and non-discrimination II (continued)

Equality of opportunity for women and men, including:

- Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality;**
- Prevention of violence against women and children**

Questions of equality between women and men remain among my Government's human rights priorities. In recent years, a set of the governmental programs and documents generating a policy in the field of gender equality was adopted.

All these programmes, in particular Gender Policy Strategic Action Plan (2011-2015) and Gender Policy Concept Paper and Strategic Action Plan to Combat Gender-based violence (2011-2015), are the basic components of the national anti-discrimination policy. The adoption and further implementation of these national strategies is a targeted work, whereby one Program of Actions is followed by the next one, containing detailed plans for each year.

The Gender Policy Concept Paper is focused on the creation of favorable conditions in legal, social, economic and cultural spheres of life, aimed at enjoyment of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women. The Concept Paper formulates country's general policy in the field of gender equality.

The principle of equality is widely reflected in the Armenian legislation. Country's civil legislation is based on equality and guarantees implementation of full range of civil and political rights.

Key international documents and standards in the field of protection of women's rights became a guideline for further action in this field. The Beijing Declaration and Programme of Action provides a clear mandate for the national human rights machinery for the advancement of women. One of the principal goals of this human rights system is to promote and achieve gender equality and ensure full enjoyment of women's rights. The national human rights system's main function should include monitoring the effective implementation of national legislation based on the principle of non-discrimination and equality, as well as incorporation

of international obligations assumed by the State in this field into national policies and agendas. With the invigoration of the Women's Council headed by the Prime Minister and including representatives of relevant ministries and NGOs active in the field, it has been decided to entrust the Council with monitoring functions as part of the national human rights institutional mechanisms.

The OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality is also among the priorities underlining the building of democratic institutions for advancing gender equality. In this context, the Ombudsman's activities as an independent body are to protect women's rights and guarantee gender equality. Taking this into consideration, the Ombudsman's office has appointed a Women's Rights Defender.

In the course of the last year, Armenia joined such important documents as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Among the steps undertaken to ensure equal participation of women in political and public life, I should underline the changes made in the Electoral Code in 2011 which incorporated gender sensitive quotas. According to the amended law "the number of representatives of each gender must not exceed 80 percent of each group of five candidates starting from the second number of the electoral list of a political party contesting seats under the proportional electoral system (article 108, para.2 Electoral Code, 2011). The Electoral Code defines legal sanctions for non-compliance "The Central Electoral Commission shall reject the registration of the electoral list of a political party, an alliance of political parties if the electoral list does not meet the requirements defined by Article 108(2), including the legislated candidate quota" (Article 110, Electoral Code of Armenia, 2011).

Following civil society's initiative, "the Law on equal rights and equal opportunities of women and men" has been drafted and later adopted. However, the latest developments regarding this law showed that despite the fact of adoption of the law, some of its elements require further fine-tuning. Misunderstanding of some of the elements of the law and misinterpretation of the concept of "gender" initiated much public debate. This was a vivid lesson as to how important public awareness is. Raising public awareness is one of the most powerful tools that need to be looked at within any efforts and strategies to promote gender equality. Studying the best practices, key successes and challenges can be an effective contribution to strengthening of equality in member States.

Thank you

