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29 June 2004

ENGLISH only

To: All Delegations
Secretariat

Please find attached the summary of the meeting of the **Informal Working Group on Gender Equality and Anti-Trafficking** held on 8 June 2004.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amb. Kongshem, Dr. Gracheva', followed by a smaller, more stylized signature.

Amb. Kongshem, Dr. Gracheva
Co-Chairs of the Group

**Summary
of the meeting of the Informal Working Group
on Gender Equality and Anti-Trafficking**

8 June 2004

*Co-chairs: Ambassador Mette Kongshem (NORWAY)
Dr. Vera Gracheva (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)*

1. Adoption of the Agenda:

The agenda was adopted.

2. Presentation by the Swedish Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, Mr. Borgstrom:

Mr. Borgstrom, Swedish Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, briefed delegations about the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman Institution. He first recalled that human rights, as defined by the UN, was the key-notion behind the Ombudsman institution. He continued by noting that National Human Rights Institutions could be divided into two categories: Ombudsmen and Human Rights Commissioners. Currently, more than 100 Ombudsman offices have been established in the world. They were all democratic institutions based on the recognition of the fundamental rights of the individual and the rule of law. *Mr. Borgstrom* then elaborated on the Equal Opportunity Ombudsman (EOO) in Sweden. It was established in 1980 at the same time as the Equal Opportunities Act came into force. He added that his office dealt with equal rights for men and women in the labour market, and since 1 March 2002, also with the equal treatment of students at universities. The Ombudsmen were appointed by the government, but enjoyed an independent status. He added that last year, his office had in fact scrutinised and criticised the lack of gender equality within the government as well as in the parliament administration. *Mr. Borgstrom* stated that the office's tasks were carried out through a number of activities. First, supervising that employers fulfil their duties in taking active measures in promoting equality at the work place. Second, processing complaints regarding sex discrimination. And lastly, advising, informing and educating employers, trade-union representatives, teachers and students. He concluded by pointing out some essential prerequisites to ensure the effectiveness of the work of the Ombudsman. First, the Ombudsman ought to be independent from the state and all its institutions. Second, the Ombudsman's mandate ought to be clearly set forth in a constitutional or legislative text. And last, funding should be arranged in an adequate way.

The *Co-Chairs* thanked Mr. Borgstrom for his comprehensive presentation. The *Co-Chair (Russian Federation)* underlined the importance of equal opportunities as well as women's rights. She also recalled that at the recent Human Dimension Seminar in Warsaw, it had been suggested to organize an OSCE Meeting of Ombudsmen. *One delegation* stressed that the laws and regulations pertaining to gender equality should be properly implemented. It also supported the promotion of a national Ombudsman in all OSCE participating States. It furthermore noted the usefulness of setting up a Gender Unit within the OSCE Secretariat. *Another delegation* wondered whether there were certain cases which predominated and whether there had been cases of reverse discrimination. *Mr. Borgstrom* replied that recently there had been an increase in discrimination against pregnant women in the labour market. He also noted that cases of reverse discrimination were more rare. The *Co-Chair (Norway)* noted that effective laws existed, however there was a need for an implementing agency. *Another*

delegation inquired whether the four various Ombudsmen in Sweden had similar mandates. It also asked for more information regarding co-operation with other Ombudsmen institutions. *Mr. Borgstrom* replied that indeed, they all had similar mandates. The basis of their mandate was the drive to implement gender equality. He also mentioned that his office had regular contact with ombudsmen institutions from other Nordic countries.

3. Second reading of Chapter I and II, and first reading of Chapter III of the Draft 2004 Action Plan for Gender Issues: The *Co-Chair (Norway)* introduced the revised version of the 2004 Action Plan for Gender Issues. *Delegations* entered into drafting mode. In conclusion, the *Co-Chair (Norway)* noted that the suggestions would be considered and a revised version would be distributed. The Action Plan would be discussed again at the meeting scheduled for Monday, 21 June.

4. Any other business:

None