



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Fifty-eighth session**

10-21 March 2014

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives**

#### **Statement submitted by Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## Statement

### Promote gender equality and empower women in education

The Northern Ireland Women's European Platform welcomes the opportunity to respond to the priority theme on the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls and the review theme on the access to and the participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work.

While the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform recognizes the impact of the eight Millennium Development Goals on women's lives, it has agreed to specifically respond in the present statement to Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment.

The indicators to monitor progress to achieve Goal 3 are education, employment and political participation, and the United Nations should not only monitor Member States but also develop time-bound targets to implement those indicators. While the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform agrees that the above indicators are all essential to the achievement of gender equality, it would argue that, most importantly, without women's participation in political processes and decision-making roles the delivery of any of the Millennium Development Goals for women will be impossible.

Although we can identify models of good practice by some Member States, which, through legislation, have fully implemented international mechanisms, for example, Rwanda and Liberia, which have implemented Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and France, which has legislated for quotas for women on boards, women continue to be underrepresented in political and public life worldwide. In Northern Ireland this is the case with regard to electoral politics, public appointments, private sector boards and key institutions, including the judiciary and bodies associated with peacebuilding.

In the 2011 elections to the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly, less than 20 per cent of the 108 members elected were women. While this was an increase over the previous figure of 13 per cent, it is still dismally low and compares unfavourably with parliaments in the rest of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for example in the Scottish Parliament, where female representation is 35 per cent, and in the Welsh Assembly, where it is 41 per cent.

In the 2011 Northern Ireland Assembly elections the candidate list was 83 per cent male; 22 per cent of the members of the Westminster Parliament, elected from Northern Ireland are women; and two of its three members of the European Parliament are women. At the local government level only 23 per cent of councillors are women. The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002, which allows positive action in relation to women's political participation, has not been used in Northern Ireland.

There has been no improvement in the representation of women in public bodies in Northern Ireland since the Government of the United Kingdom last reported to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2008. Figures for 2011-2012 show that: 33 per cent of members of public bodies are

women, a reduction of 1 per cent over the previous year; 18 per cent of chairs of public bodies are women (down 4 per cent over the previous year); and 27 per cent of all applications for public office received were from women.

The representation of women in public bodies is a highly significant issue in Northern Ireland as these bodies are responsible for key areas of social policy provision, including housing, health and social services, education and training, police and equality and human rights issues.

In the 2013 report of the United Kingdom to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reference was made to the “aspiration” that, by 2015, 50 per cent of all new appointments being made to public boards will be women, but no details were shared as to how this would be achieved. There is no reference to any specific initiatives to increase the number of women in public life in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is a society still emerging from over 30 years of violent conflict. Although a considerable body of international reporting on this issue has emphasized the importance of women’s participation in politics and decision-making for the creation of peaceful and stable societies, as yet there has been no evidence of recent changes in the administrative structures in Northern Ireland.

#### **Fields of study in the categories of science, technology, engineering and mathematics**

In Northern Ireland the overall positive picture of educational attainment for girls masks a number of concerns regarding the equality of girls in education and training, including the intersectionality between class and gender (resulting in very poor prospects for girls who leave school with no qualifications) and deeply embedded gender stereotyping with regard to subjects and vocational courses taken by girls and young women.

There are continuing problems regarding the provision of non-gendered career advice and the active encouragement of young women to study in non-traditional areas.

In Northern Ireland, as in other parts of the United Kingdom, there is a strong emphasis on the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics and growth in the number of students taking these subjects has been strongly linked to strategies to develop the Northern Ireland economy.

Only 9 per cent of participants in apprenticeships in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and related areas are female. In 2013, only 2 per cent of participants in apprenticeships in areas defined by the Government as “economically important” are female. At the higher educational levels, 74 per cent of students taking courses in computer science are male, in engineering and technology it is 80 per cent and in architecture, building and planning it is 70 per cent.

Little has changed in terms of gender segregation in subject areas over the last 15 years. It has been acknowledged by the Government that, given the dominance of men in the above areas, most of the growth sectors identified for the Northern Irish economy “will be heavily populated by male employees”.

Northern Ireland has a very high proportion of young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training. Many young women who have left

school early or with no qualifications do so as a result of broader factors such as poverty, young motherhood, abuse and domestic violence and family-related caring responsibilities.

A Government study has revealed that young women who are not involved in education, employment or training are much more likely to have an identified barrier to participation (42 per cent) than young men (9 per cent). However, the subsequent strategy to address the issue makes no specific reference to these gender issues and contains no proposals to address them.

We welcome the statement by the Minister for Employment and Learning for Northern Ireland that gender issues will be a major aspect of the forthcoming review of the careers strategy and that it will form part of the review of apprenticeships and youth training. It is important that this includes addressing gender stereotyping in teachers' training and the training of career advisers.

**Recommendations for the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 3:  
women in politics and decision-making**

- Governments need to take urgent and appropriate action to ensure that Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) is fully implemented in order to ensure the inclusion of women in decision-making positions in pre- and post-conflict situations.
- Governments need to commit to introducing temporary special measures (including time-bound targets) to address the continued underrepresentation of women in political and public life.
- Governments need to adopt positive measures to increase women's representation in political parties, including incentives for political parties to ensure their implementation.

**Recommendations in relation to access of women and girls to education in  
science, technology, engineering and mathematics**

- Governments need to take urgent action to address the marked underrepresentation of women in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics and to address the immediate need to tackle gender stereotyping in teacher training and in the training of career advisers.
- Governments need to be specific about their responsibility for addressing deficits in these areas, the targets to be set and the measures to be adopted to reach these goals.
- Governments need to research and recognize the reasons for the underrepresentation of young women in education, employment and training programmes and to commit themselves to take measures to address the root causes and to provide appropriate support.