



NATIONS UNIES

COMMISSION ÉCONOMIQUE
POUR L'EUROPE

ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫЕ НАЦИИ

ЕВРОПЕЙСКАЯ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ
КОМИССИЯ

UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement

by

Mr. Christian Friis Bach

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission
for Europe**

at

the Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting

Geneva, 6 November 2014

Opening Statement at the Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting

Your Royal Highness, Crown Princess Mary,
Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues and Friends,

I am very happy indeed to welcome all of you to the UNECE Regional Preparatory Meeting for the twenty year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In particular, I would like to welcome our guest of honor, HRH Crown Princess Mary of Denmark, and the distinguished co-host of our meeting, the Executive Director of UN Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,.

Let me start also by thanking our co-host UN Women and their regional office, as well as the regional offices of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO, WHO and FAO for their substantive support to this meeting. And Denmark and the Netherlands for their generous contributions which made it possible to have strong participation from all over our region. It is encouraging that almost 400 representatives of governments, civil society, companies and academia have come to discuss our region's achievements and challenges in the area of gender equality. It is encouraging that almost all ECE member States have sent us their national reports. And it is encouraging that almost 600 representatives of women's groups and other civil society organizations have met in this room during the past three days to discuss gender equality.

This strong engagement shows that gender equality is a top priority for the ECE region.

It was in 1995 that the countries of the world came together at the Fourth World Conference on Women and agreed on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This framework was a game-changer. It showed a path to a world with equal rights and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys. And it has helped to improve the life of millions of women and girls all over the world.

Next year, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women will commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. Also next year, the world must also agree on an ambitious set of Sustainable Development Goals towards 2030 – hopefully with a strong goal on gender equality and strong gender targets within all goals. This is why it is so important that we today and tomorrow provide a strong voice from our region on gender equality.

At this meeting, we will take stock of what we have accomplished over the last two decades – and I hope and trust that we will hear encouraging and inspiring stories and statistics. But we will also hear that much remains to be done to achieve gender equality. Our goal is to identify the obstacles that hinder the full empowerment of women, and find policies, measures and actions that can remove them. Let us use this meeting as an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the Beijing framework, to gender equality, to women's empowerment.

The interactive panel discussions will focus on five issues – progress and setbacks, economic and social policies, women’s representation in decision-making, violence against women, gender justice and finally, how to move ahead.

The regional synthesis report, which I really encourage you to read, shows strong political progress, lots of inspiring best-practices, and many institutional improvements that promote gender equality throughout our region on all issues. However, it also shows that too often, implementation lags behind.

Women’s economic opportunities have indeed improved, with subsidized childcare, financing schemes and support to women entrepreneurs, more focus on unequal wages and diversity targets in many companies. But the full economic equality and empowerment of women in the ECE region is still far away and the economic crisis has halted or even reversed progress. From 2004 to 2012, only six out of 56 countries in our region managed to narrow the gap between women’s and men’s participation in the workforce by more than 5 percentage points. And in four of these six countries, the gap narrowed not because the women’s situation improved, but because the men’s situation became worse.

Inequalities persist, sometimes at drastic levels. Throughout our region, women are still doing caregiving and housework, they have less job security, are paid less than men for the same work, get fewer benefits, less-fulfilling careers, and in the end, less economic independence. A woman in the EU on average will get a 40% lower pension when she retires than the average man. That’s a huge difference. And young women’s unemployment has gone up to over 50% in some Southern European countries. This is not good enough – and remember, if we did better, the entire economy would benefit.

Women’s representation in policy-making and decision-making has improved. When I was a minister in Denmark the country was ruled by Her Majesty the Queen, the Prime Minister was a woman, the number two in the government was a woman and the number three in the government was a woman. Sometimes, we men felt slightly marginalised. Luckily this trend is seen in many countries. The average ratio of women in the parliaments of our region rose from less than one out of five to now one out of four during the past ten years. It is better but still not good enough and in some countries it is only one out of ten. Many more women now act as managers both in private companies and in public organisations, but less than one out of 10 of CEOs are women and very few women are on corporate boards. And we lack data when it comes to government bodies. More needs to be done – and more can be done as some countries have proved.

Even more serious is it when we, tomorrow, turn our attention to one of the worst abuses of human rights in our society: Violence against women. It is now widely condemned by law and both awareness and attention have grown, although the economic crisis has reduced funding and services for the victims or potential victims, such as abuse hotlines and shelters. Too many victims of violence do not seek help or are too ashamed to seek help or justice. In many communities, it is still a hidden problem that people do not talk about. But the problem is huge. The EU estimates that one in three women undergoes physical violence in their lifetime and this shocking number may even be higher. The background document for this panel, prepared by UNICEF, details the staggering extent of the problem: honour killings, trafficking, stalking, sexual harassment, physical abuse and rape. It is definitely not acceptable. Governments, police, courts, civil society, companies, communities, citizens – all of us – must do much more to protect women from violence. I

encourage you all to act with urgency.

This is closely linked to the issue of governance and gender justice. Again, countries have improved their legislation, but implementation lags behind, and women are not always able to access the benefits of new laws. This is especially true for certain groups of women and girls: migrants, those with disabilities, rural women, minority women, refugees, and victims of armed conflict or natural disasters. Improved access to justice must reach out to all and here we need active community involvement.

This was a brief introduction to our thematic discussions during the next two days. And apart from our formal meeting there will be several side events. All will touch on very important topics, such as women in armed conflict, women with disabilities and trafficking. I encourage you to attend as many as you can.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

ECE is strongly committed to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in the region, both in our own work and in working together with our member States and partners. We will help our member States to collect and use sex-disaggregated data in their policy practices and focus on economic aspects of gender, including women's entrepreneurship. We will do our best. I am sure you all will do your best.

Let's work together to boost the Beijing agenda. And let's work together to shape the new sustainable development agenda so that every girl and every woman can live in safety and with dignity.

Thank you for your attention.
