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UN Committee on the  
Elimination of All Forms of  
Discrimination against Women

**Check against delivery 17 February 2014**

**This submission is given orally, on behalf of the Finnish Human Rights Centre (NHRI), by Ms Katharine Rose of the ICC before the CEDAW-Committee on 17 February 2014**

**Madame Chairperson,  
Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Despite our best efforts, yours as well as ours, regardless of all the changes in the societies, the development of international law and national legislation as well as the increased knowledge of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the discrimination against women is still amongst us. It comes in many shapes and forms but it is there, hiding, waiting around the corner, sometimes and some places more visible than in others.

Finland, as one of the Nordic countries, is considered by many a haven for gender equality, non-discrimination, status of women and all things good and rosy. This, however, is not the full picture. We might not have public stoning of rape victims on a city square nor little girls forced to drop out of school for having to earn living for the family and so on. We have even been accused of having pushed the white middle aged men into a small corner by all the advancement of rights of the women! But there are other issues.

I wish to draw your attention to some issues that the Finnish Human Rights Centre considers worthy of elaboration. Several NGOs as well as the Human Rights Centre itself have given written observations for your information. Many important topics are included in those elaborate statements and this submission serves as an addition to them.

**Madame Chairperson,**

One of the most current, widely discussed and deeply shameful issue with regard to the rights of the women is gender based violence. By many accounts, reports, studies, recommendations by various international monitoring organs and ombudspersons Finland does not have sufficient amount of appropriate, accessible and geographically distributed services for victims of domestic and other violence. Many groups of victims find themselves without understanding and assistance, be it that they are disabled, intoxicated, of immigrant background or members of the LGTBI community or simply happen to live in a remote area, of



which we have plenty. The fact that the need for such services is not recognised is alarming. Some larger cities have closed down some shelters and the funding of many others has been diminished in the times of economic prioritising. The preparation for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention does not seem to bring any improvement for the said resources. In all, the systematic issue of violence, especially, but not exclusively, against women in the society is something that should be addressed and prevented more decisively on all levels of society. Also, in case the prevention fails, as often is the case, the victims should be protected, regardless of their home municipality, standing in the community or status as a member of a minority or otherwise.

### **Distinguished Members of the Committee,**

Trafficking in women is something that for long was and still is somewhat denied as a problem existing within our borders. Measures addressing the demand causing human trafficking have proven inadequate and no significant changes are foreseen in the near future. Currently the existence of trafficking is acknowledged, to a certain extent, but the victims of sexual exploitation in prostitution and procuring are often not recognised. As a result they are deprived of assistance, support and protection. Most victims included in the assistance programs are victims of employment based exploitation, unlike in almost all other countries in the world. The police, the prosecutors and other authorities do not recognise trafficking victims of sexual exploitation, partly because it is hard and there are hardly any specialised personnel within authorities, but partly also for the still prevailing attitudes towards women and sex industry.

One reason for the lack of understanding and outdated attitudes is the lack of systematic human rights and gender education. The importance of ensuring human rights education, including education on equality issues from a human rights perspective, to all throughout the educational system cannot be overemphasized. The Human Rights Centre has conducted the first ever national base line study on human rights education, which clearly shows that there is no systematic, coherent or comprehensive framework covering the entire educational system and including human rights education in all its aspects, meaning education *about, through* and *for* human rights. This has also been noted by several human rights bodies, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Human Rights Committee, among others.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Multiple discrimination, non-discrimination and gender equality are all issues which are under legislative reforms currently. And they have been for years, far too many years. Many women and girls, including women with disabilities, minority women, including indigenous women, women of foreign origin, elderly women or lesbian, bisexual, trans and intersex women, face discrimination on multiple grounds and in the attempts of finding redress for the violation of their rights find it very hard to cope with the system. The concept of multiple discrimination does not exist in the legislation, nor do specific provisions on gender identity, gender expression or intersex status. Understanding who can help in a discrimination situation is not always clear, as the forum depends on the grounds of discrimination or the place, in which the discrimination took place. The individual is lost in the system and



often finds it easier to cope with the issue privately, home alone, behind closed doors. The NGOs that offer assistance are poorly funded, authorities are often unaware of the causes for discrimination and the stigma of being labelled as something undesirable, as well as unclear and missing legislation, prevents persons from demanding their rights. This should not be the case.

**Honorable Committee Members,**

As you all well know, gender mainstreaming is the key to all enhancements of the rights of the women. It is not understood, that gender equality is the aim towards which we all should strive using gender mainstreaming as a tool. The gender mainstreaming efforts need to be crosscutting and coordinated on the highest level of the society and the government. Too often gender mainstreaming, as well as human rights, are considered as something only for the specific human rights units or human rights contact persons in a ministry, authority or individual office. Mainstreaming is done, quite regularly, by including it as a line in high level political guidance documents. This is where it unfortunately often remains. The civil servants responsible for the mainstreaming actions do not know how to bring it to practical level, they do not get sufficient guidance from upper management, and in lack of resources, it is easy to disregard gender mainstreaming, as it is something vague and distant from the everyday work. The same goes also for the fulfilment of gender mainstreaming recommendations from the human rights monitoring mechanisms. The question is "how to" in practise. As with most of the problems, education, once again, is the key.

All this said I wish to thank you all for your attention and the opportunity to bring these issues to your attention. I trust you will have a good and fruitful hearing with the government delegation on Friday. Let the good work continue!

**Thank you.**