

Tere hommikust
Good Morning

Ladies and gentlemen,

First I would like to say that I am very proud and pleased to be invited to present to you the gender equality situation in Norway. This has been and still is one of the most important issues in Norway. So thank you for the invitation.

You have asked me to speak about women in business with a specific focus on quotas in the board rooms of companies in Norway. So I will do. But in order to fully understand how this has worked out in Norway – reactions and results – it is important to keep in mind how gender equality has evolved in my country.

When I was a student in the 80s we were not too many women at master level. Those of us who were master students often got the question - why – don't you want to have children as if this was a clash of interests. We answered like Winnie the Poo – thank you – we want both. And this has been and still is the “Colombus Egg” of Norwegian gender politics - combining gender equality with comprehensive family and parental provisions. Today 80% of women work and the fertility rate is 1.98 among the highest in the developed world.

Let me quote my Minister: PHOTO

“Nations of the world will only prosper and develop when using the talents and competence of all their citizens. There is clear scientific evidence that the participation of women and girls in education, work life and the economy - along with boys and men, makes a significant difference in GNP, effectiveness, innovation and competitive edge.”

“The right to gainful work and a wage to sustain your own life, is a basic human right, along with the right to political participation, regardless of your gender. The freedom for men and women alike, to have careers and families; not to be forced to choose “either – or”, is basic to modern society. I would say that there is broad consensus on this approach today.”

Why is it so?

We have worked on making enabling policies and structures since 1960s and thus empowered girls and women to be visible in the labour market, to be eligible to high positions in board rooms as well as to compete for top management jobs in private and public sectors. It has not always been an easy match. It has also been an ongoing battle fed by impatience and campaigns, often confronting the Government. Values decisions as these always are, would not carry through parliament without the support from women's NGO's, consultations and negotiations with social partners and now men's voices as well.

Before I present to you some milestones in the gender equality history in Norway, allow me to start with some personal reflections. I am born in 1954. I grew up with female emancipation. My daughter born in 1981 grew up with a female PM. Nobody would ask her why she went to university.

We had to fight our rights.
Examples from

- cross country skiing and ski jumping

Things started to really move in the beginning of 1970's. A clear reflection is the female coup during local elections in 1971 – deleting men from the list. Photo 3. Majority of women.

Each year in 70'2 gathered lots of people March 8 – rather confronting attitudes.

- Different slogans. Examples.

And results came. It worked.

Already in the 1970s, some political parties adopted male/female quotas on the electoral lists on voluntary basis. In 1981 we got the the Gender Equality Act which since then has contained rules on gender representation in publicly appointed boards, committees, councils, delegations to mention some. Since 1988 the requirement has been 40 percent. So the use of quotas is not a new measure in Norwegian policymaking. It has a long history.

All the demonstrations, all the debates, the female revolution paved the way to our first female prime minister in 1986 – Gro Harlem Brundtland. PHOTO Since that time all governments have kept the unwritten rule of at least 40 per cent of each sex in the Cabinet. Photo 2. Party leaders today. In 1993 we included a provision in the Municipal Act to secure gender balance in local political committees.

Today the political participation of women is quite high with parity in Cabinet, 40% in Parliament and as an average in local and regional councils.

No let me turn to women in business and quotas which has been heavily debated. In 2003 the Norwegian Parliament passed the law requiring large enterprises noted on the stock exchange market (Public Limited Companies) to have more than 40 per cent women in their boardroom positions. We have now introduced the same rule for state-owned companies and cooperatives, and we have recently included small companies where municipalities own 2/3 or more of the shares.

Why did we do this? In 2003 women were visible in all pther sectors of society as outstanding and competent but not in the corporate sector. A figure of 7% women on the boards of the 500 largest companies (2003), was an issue of political embarrassment. So time was more than ripe for change and innovation. But this was no easy match. The law was rather controversial.

Several top Norwegian business leaders say today that at the time they were opposed in principle to quotas, but believe now the law has been effective and are happy with the results. Fears of not finding enough qualified women to fill board seats proved unfounded. Another expressed fear that “women would not take on such responsibilities” was totally unfounded. That companies would have to flee Norway as to prosper, was another “popular” saying in 2003, but Norwegian companies are doing quite well. This has changed the mental images of women's abilities and possibilities forever.

Today we see

- 40,2% women on the boards of PLC's
- 17% women on the boards of private companies

- 27% female top managers in the State sector (ministries etc), 47% middle managers
- 20% female top managers in private sector (all) Still a way to go.
- 36% female middle m. in private sector (all)
- 42% female top managers in Municipal sector (though only 18,4% head of Municipal councils).

Let me show you 4 photos of women in top positions.

Recent research supports that diversity in the board rooms pays.

Morten Huse (Oslo Business School)/Sabina Nielsen (Copenhagen Business School), 2010:
The Contribution of Women on boards of Directors. Results as follows:

- High female participation gives more priority to strategic control/accountability
- More emphasis on the self-development of the board as a team
- Produces instructions for good governance
- More systematic competence building
- Less conflicts and more efficiency

We should also keep in mind that building an image and reputation in the marketplace is of utmost importance for any business. The issue of having gender equality in board rooms, seems to be crucial to recruit and retain the best people.

Strategic work in boardrooms needs also to mirror the diversity outside; the complex markets and different demands. Half of the consumers are women, with their own purse.

Let me add the obvious before concluding that. Womens participation in the workplace or in politics would not have been possible without comprehensive family and parental provisions.

In Norway we have

- Paid Parental leave: 56 weeks with 80% refunding of your salary (either parent), or 46 weeks with 100% refunding, up to a certain level. I know you have a better scheme for this.
- Most important and controversial at the time: 2009 enlarged 10 weeks mandatory for the fathers, appr. 90% enjoy this non-transferable quota. Unless the fathers take this leave the family will lose the refunding of his salary.
- 26,7% of the fathers share more of the whole period with the mothers; which is a most wanted trend (2008).

Photos 3 – Supported by these guys.

Gender equality doesn't come easy.

We still have unsolved challenges on gender equality in Norway. A major challenge is the pay gap between women and men – the pay per hour for work of equal value. Photo: March 8 - 2010.

We have a gender segmented labour market. Even though 80% of women are working, women continue to make the soft choices and 40% work part-time esp. in the health-, care-, and retail sectors.

An Equal Pay Commission in 2008 analyzed wages in private, state and municipal sectors. The Commission established the fact we all know: Professions where women traditionally are in majority, is lower prized in the labor market. One of the important findings was that the wage development for women becoming mothers comes to a halt, and tend to follow the person ever since, as the men becoming fathers tend to have higher wages.

Photo

A White Paper on equal pay submitted to Parliament earlier this year is a tool to keep the pressure on the social partners in the collective annual bargaining on wages. Furthermore the Ombudsman's office will have stronger measures in the Gender Equality Law to handle complaints of pay discrimination.

Furthermore we still need better sharing between mother and father for taking care of children and home responsibilities. Many women still speak of "the husbands helping out in the house and with the children". Again, exclusion of the men, or men as mere "assistants" in the house. As if the house work is not a shared responsibility, regardless of gender. Women must let go, too.

Last week the Norwegian Minister for Children, Equality and Social Inclusion Audun Lysbakken presented the Governments action plan "Gender Equality 2014" This plan involves 86 specific actions for developing gender equality facing the new challenges in society and thereby contribute to increased justice, democracy and division of power. To ensure that the goals are met, indicators for success are listed in each area.

It is also in this spirit that the Norway and EEA Grants – a fund of 1,79 bill EUR sponsored by Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein -- include opportunities for promoting gender equality in Estonia and 14 other beneficiary countries.

In Estonia 2 mill EUR is allocated for gender equality mainstreaming and another 2 million for efforts against domestic and gender based violence. These two programmes will jointly be implemented by the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs. In addition there will be a 2,3 million fund for Non-governmental organisations and the Open Estonia Foundation is the candidate for the fund manager.

At the moment all these three programmes are yet developed – it is not yet determined what kind of activities will be supported. We hope that the programmes will be finalized and approved by March-April 2012. So the funds will open sometimes next year.

So to conclude let me say:

The battle for gender equality in Norway is still live.

We still need to focus on, repeat and highlight that equal representation of women and men combined with modern family policy are crucial to the development of a modern society.

And more – it is a win-win situation for both men and women. We want to secure both women's and men's possibilities to work and to care for children and family - not to be forced to choose one or the other.

Talent is evenly divided among women and men – for child-caring as well as for business. Gender economy is smart economy.

Thank you for the attention.