The Permanent Mission of Iceland
to the United Nations

Statement by
H.E. Ambassador Gréta Gunnarsdóttir
Permanent Representative

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
Mr./Madam Chair,

Allow me to start by congratulating you and other members of the Bureau on your election to this very important committee. You can rest assured that the Icelandic Delegation will work with the Bureau in the spirit of cooperation throughout this session.

Mr./Madam Chair,

Iceland would like to make it a priority to highlight the importance of CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. While we are pleased to note how many states have ratified CEDAW, we remain deeply concerned by the high number of reservations and call upon those States which have made reservations incompatible with the purposes and objective of the treaty, to immediately withdraw them.

In 2015, we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the women’s conference in Beijing. We call on all Member States to renew efforts to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Iceland has been advocating for celebrating the anniversary through a twelve-month campaign, focusing on each of the twelve themes of Beijing. We note that UN Women is planning its strategy along these lines.

Mr./Madam Chair,

Women represent two-thirds of the illiterate population in the world. Women are in great minority in parliaments worldwide and an even greater minority of women are heads of state or government. Women are still largely kept out of peace processes, peace-building and disarmament issues. Since 1992, women have signed 2% of peace treaties and only 3% of peacekeepers are women. According to UN Women, no woman has served as chief or lead mediator in UN-sponsored peace talks. These numbers are not acceptable.
Women’s active participation and empowerment in all aspects of society can have a transformative impact on multiple issues, such as on poverty reduction, crisis prevention and in ending gender based violence. The benefits of women’s participation have repeatedly been pointed out and despite successes in various areas, further action is clearly needed.

Mr. /Madam Chair,

In 2008 Iceland was among the first Member States to adopt a National Action Plan on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. This Plan has recently been revised, taking into consideration lessons learned, experiences of other Member States and the Secretary General’s recommendations on how to improve and strengthen the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Although resolution 1325 marked a turning point for the better, systematic progress on its goals is still greatly lacking, despite subsequent resolutions that further strengthen the objectives of 1325. We should do better.

Mr. /Madam Chair,

Women and girls suffer disproportionately from gender-based and sexual violence. We need to end this scourge, break the silence, place the responsibility on the perpetrators and not the victims, and end impunity for such crimes.

In one of the articles in the UN Arms Trade Treaty, adopted earlier this year, it is specified that states shall take into account the risk of conventional arms being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence. This clause, which Iceland advocated for, found its way into the treaty for a reason. It reaffirms that gender-based violence needs to be factored in and fought against every step of the way when ensuring peace and security.
I would like to use this opportunity to commend the United Kingdom, as well as the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Bangura, for organizing in September a High Level Event to declare a global commitment to end sexual violence in conflict. Iceland fully supported the declaration adopted at the event.

Mr. /Madam Chair,

Part of Iceland’s contribution to gender equality and women’s empowerment is the Gender Equality Studies and Training Programme (GEST) which formally became a part of the United Nations University (UNU-GEST) in May this year, making it the fourth such UNU Programme located in Iceland.

This Programme, which started as a pilot collaboration project of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the University of Iceland in 2009, is an important part of Iceland’s Official Development Assistance. The objective of the Programme is to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in developing countries and post-conflict societies through education and training.

In conclusion Mr. /Madam Chair, allow me to turn to the fundamental importance for gender equality and women’s empowerment to be promoted more effectively in all UN processes, most significantly in the number of international processes culminating in 2015, where the integration of a gender perspective to ensure full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is crucial.

We need to reinforce our common efforts to ensure that the overriding objective is always to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment - with zero tolerance for backlashes on commitments made.
There will be no real progress without the participation of half of mankind. We will not be able to address climate change without women. We will not be able to address food security without women. We will not address maternal and child mortality without ensuring the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women. This is why Iceland firmly believes that we need not only a stand-alone goal on gender equality and women’s empowerment, but also to ensure gender mainstreaming throughout the whole Post-2015 development framework.

Thank you Mr. /Madam Chair.