Statement by Mr. Sven Jürgenson
Permanent Representative of Estonia to the UN at the UN-Women Annual session 2016

Madame Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director,
I would like to thank you for your opening statement and for the Report on progress made on
the UN Women strategic plan, 2014-2017, including the Midterm Review.

Estonia, as one of the founders, has always been a great supporter of UN Women,
whose work has been essential in advancing women’s and girls’ rights in the world.
Therefore, we are especially glad to learn from the report presented today that UN-Women
has seen progress in several areas towards 2017. We are extremely pleased to see not only the
progress made by UN-Women but also the effectiveness in its strategies, initiatives and
actions towards the ultimate ambitions of the Strategic Plan. From the report it is apparent,
that UN Women has a well-established “learn-as-you-go” mentality that is a driving factor in
their effectiveness to cope and work in many different nations and cultures. In some issues,
the positive impact had exceeded expectations so fast, that the initial goals had to be raised -
for example in the number of countries with constitutional provisions on women’s
participation in decision-making. On the other hand some tasks were learned to be harder
than expected, so their targets needed to be revised. But what truly characterizes UN
Women’s tremendous impact on gender equality, is their competence and ability to address a
large range of issues that have now improved to a considerable extent. In other words, the
results on the new report speak for themselves. However, with all provisions made in
countries where initiatives have been taken, it is important to consistently follow-up and see
whether they been implemented and incorporated from a bureaucratic level to real-life
situations.

Madam Executive Director,

Estonia has also taken upon itself to concentrate on women’s rights. One of the main
areas we focus on is the access to quality-education which we believe is one of the main
elements towards women’s and girl’s empowerment. ICT and digitalization helps to create
better educational opportunities to children in remote rural areas and conflict-zones. On one
hand, it gives free access to information prompting everybody to learn about human-rights
themselves. On the other hand, it enables women to participate in a modern society where
they can be inspired and have their voices heard.

It has been proven, that knowledge derived from ICTs directly contribute to the economic
empowerment of women from which the community as a whole - men and women can
benefit from. Based on this fact, Estonia has, for example, supported a project in Afghanistan
where local women received a thorough six-month IT training according to the needs of local
entrepreneurs which brought about improvement to the employment rate and livelihood to
women in that specific region.

When it comes to the political inclusion of women, ICT can tackle this issue as well.
Today Estonia is still the only country to offer online voting. In the 2015 parliamentary
elections, 32% of votes were cast online from 116 countries around the world. Online voting
ensures that women who officially have the right to vote, most certainly can. Ultimately, this
can advocate, encourage and benefit women in politics.
Thus, it is pleasant to see that the Midterm Review has identified a number of findings and lessons learned from the first two years of implementation, and that one of its six new strategic initiatives is innovation. Estonia strongly supports the efforts of UN Women in spreading the knowledge and potential that ICT offers regarding women’s and girl’s rights.

Madam Executive Director,

This year is an important one because we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the International Human Rights Covenant, and the 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development. As we do this, let us place gender equality and women’s empowerment higher on the global agenda as ever before. This will demand focus from each and everyone of us and we all have a lot of work to do. Estonia’s main aims from 2016 to 2023 will be promoting equal economic independence, balanced participation in all levels of decision-making and tackling gender stereotypes. The activities will also contribute to reducing gender pay-gap, guaranteeing efficient legal protection against gender-based discrimination and supporting institutional capacity to promote gender equality.

We know that changing stereotypical thinking, or brushing away outdated opinions is not an easy task. Let’s put in every effort towards achieving our goals.

Madam Executive Director, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let’s not lose the momentum!

Thank you.