



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

National statement delivered by

Gilles BAUWENS, Counsellor

**UNGA 78
THIRD COMMITTEE
Item 25: Advancement of Women
General Debate**

New York, 3rd October 2023

President,

Belgium would like to seize this occasion to underline the great importance it attaches to gender equality and the human rights of women and girls, in all their diversity. Despite all commitments and efforts, the full realization of women's human rights is still far from a reality.

Let us be honest. The goal is clear and realistic and the success factors are well known. Of crucial importance is the realization of women and girl's full and equal participation in decision-making, at all levels and in all domains.

In this regard, allow me to first draw attention to the widespread hate speech, misinformation and disinformation – very often online – that women leaders and decision-makers worldwide face. By systematically targeting, intimidating and silencing women, online and offline gender-based violence has a particularly negative impact on women's right to freedom of expression. It leads to self-censorship and withdrawal from public spaces, and it sends the message that women and girls have no place in public life. Belgium calls on all countries to take bold and effective actions to stop this widespread pattern of misogyny, intimidation and violence.

Second, women and girl's empowerment and equal participation in decision-making requires the elimination of structural barriers, discriminatory laws and norms perpetuating gender stereotypes. No law, no tradition, no religion, no value, nor any custom or culture can ever justify gender discrimination. We need to step up, enforce non-discrimination laws and make sure that every woman and girl worldwide knows her rights and how to enforce them.

Third, Belgium wishes to underline the importance of sexual and reproductive health, rights and services. This should not be a contentious subject. We are all committed to the goals of gender equality, equal participation and a life free of violence for women and girls. But those goals cannot be reached without giving to women the choice, without guaranteeing their sexual and reproductive health and rights. This includes effective access to information, to sexual and reproductive health services, to modern methods of contraception of their choice and safe abortion and to comprehensive sexuality education for all.

Of course, there are many more domains requiring dedicated action, gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting, such as quality education for all, quota or target numbers for inclusive decision-making, the unequal distribution of care responsibilities, the role of media in fighting negative

stereotypes, women and girls' access to justice, to inheritance and to land, the gender and pension pay gaps and the use of digitalization, technology and innovation to make a positive difference.

All those fields require knowledge and insight based on the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex, gender and other characteristics.

Above all, they require political will and dedication.

And they require us to cooperate, remain open to dialogue, take on challenges and overcome differences and resistance. In this regard Belgium would like to recognize and applaud the work and achievements of civil society organizations, women's organizations and women human rights defenders. They play a vital role in furthering progress and deserve our recognition, support and protection.

Thank you, President.