

FEDERATION WALLONIA-BRUSSELS
PRESIDENCY OF THE GOVERNMENT
RUDY DEMOTTE



63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women
Statement on behalf of Belgium during the general
debate

Madam President,
Distinguished representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with conviction and a sense of urgency that my delegation endorses the statement made on behalf of the European Union!

Almost a quarter of a century after the *Fourth World Conference on Women*, women still do not have equal access to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure. They face obstacles and constraints related to their assigned roles and their positions in the economy and society.

While the fundamental rights of women and girls are universal and inalienable, gender inequality is persistent and structural.

This is a cross-cutting issue that must be addressed at all levels and in all fields: civil, political, economic, social and cultural.

It is therefore **crucial that we include gender in all budgetary processes and policies; in particular in our social protection systems, employment regulations and access to public services and infrastructure, in order to proactively support gender equality and the empowerment of women.**

Belgium was one of the first countries in the world to adopt binding legislation in this area. **This approach remains a priority and we must continue to make progress in how to implement it.**

Social protection is an important tool for socially sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. Measures must be taken to ensure access to an adequate level of income throughout life, as well as to universal health cover, by making healthcare physically and financially accessible to all. It is imperative that we ensure that the specific health needs of women and girls are addressed through **access to quality health services.**

In this regard, I would like to stress here that their sexual and reproductive rights must be respected. These services must meet their needs and be complemented by mechanisms that ensure access to information and comprehensive sex education from an early age for both boys and girls.

Madam President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Too many women still die as a result of illegal and unsafe abortions. However, voluntary motherhood is a fundamental human right. Women must have the freedom of choice and self-determination to decide whether or not to continue a pregnancy.

Voluntary termination of pregnancy must be a health issue and be covered by social security. In States where this is still the case, it must cease to be considered a crime or misdemeanour and be removed from the Penal or Criminal Code.

Beyond social protection in all its dimensions, women's empowerment cannot be achieved without guaranteeing equal access to education, work, security, income and resources, whether natural, financial or social, or without ensuring their full participation in public, political and economic decision-making.

Belgium has adopted a large number of **quota laws** to promote the more equal participation of women in decision-making, particularly at the political level and on the boards of directors of private publicly-traded companies.

The Belgian State has adopted several action plans in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, such as the third "*women, peace and security*" *national action plan* (2017-2021) and the *national action plan to combat all forms of gender violence* (2015-2019).

Madam President,

Violence against women must be considered a serious violation of human rights and a worrying form of gender discrimination.

Here again, the fight against sexual and gender-based violence and intimidation is a priority for us. The *national action plan to combat all forms of gender violence* seeks to address these, focusing on different forms of violence: domestic violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriages, gender-based violence, sexual violence and prostitution.

We must **invest in the prevention** of all forms of violence, including by reducing the obstacles that prevent victims from reporting them, giving them access to justice, so that perpetrators can effectively be prosecuted.

It is with this aim in mind that **Belgium has set up three reception centres to provide comprehensive, multidisciplinary and, above all, humane care for victims, in order to reduce the traumatic consequences of violence.**

Thank you.

