**Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women 20 years after Beijing –**

**the Bulgarian Perspective**

**H.E. Mr. Stephan Tafrov, Ambassador,**

**Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN**

Twenty years after Beijing gender equality still remains a major challenge in all parts of the world. The conversation has started but we need to turn words into action in order to achieve full equality between women and men and to be true to the commitments we all made when adopting the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action back in 1995.

Bulgaria attaches great importance to gender equality and views it as an absolute necessity for the full realization of human rights and the functioning of democracy. Women’s rights are human rights and human rights are women’s rights. This principle forms part of all government strategies, policies and programmes at national level.

Gender equality is particularly important also from an economic perspective considering the fact that women's employment contributes immensely to the economic growth and in Bulgaria we can already see the positive results for the economy from the increased participation of women in the labour market in the last more than 25 years. This has been achieved through a number of strategic policy initiatives of the Bulgarian Government enabling women to pursue a career, including legislation, policy measures, funding, providing affordable and high quality social services, promoting the role of the father in the family, developing opportunities for flexible employment and professional mobility of the work force, enhancing the control on the implementation, etc.

Special efforts are made also to bring about a change in gender relations and to create the necessary conditions for the abolishment of traditional gender stereotypes and perceived roles of women and men in society that impede the full realization of gender equality.

In order to address discrimination against women in a systematic and comprehensive way Bulgaria applies a dual-track approach to gender equality that includes the elaboration of specific policies in critical areas for the advancement of women on the one hand, and the promotion and monitoring of the process of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes on the other.

The Government of Bulgaria is working in active collaboration with the civil society for achieving better results on all issues related to gender equality.

It is important also to emphasize the role of the international community in promoting women’s rights and achieving gender equality globally. As negotiations on the Post-2015 development agenda enter their final and crucial stage, Bulgaria continues to work actively with other partners in support of proposed Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women which would be an important step forward for the realization of the human rights of women and girls with the aim to achieve the common goal of a full and real gender equality by 2030.

Now I would like to give the floor to Ms. Svetlana Angelova who is a Member of Parliament and the Deputy Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Labour, Social and Demographic Policy of the National Assembly of Bulgaria. She will share the Bulgarian experience with regard to promoting gender equality and the role of men in family life.

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