

**51TH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
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STATEMENT

BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Madame Chairperson

The promotion of gender equality and women's rights has been one of the priorities of Liechtenstein's participation in the work of the United Nations since its accession to the organization some seventeen years ago. We are therefore pleased to take again part in this session of the Commission on the Status of Women and to contribute to this general exchange of views and experiences.

Since the legal equality of women and men was enshrined in the Liechtenstein Constitution in 1992 and since Liechtenstein ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1996, the Liechtenstein Government has engaged in vigorous efforts to realize the principle of gender equality. In December 2004, the Liechtenstein Parliament decided to incorporate EU Directive 2002/73/EC, the goal of which is to realize the equal treatment of men and women in the workplace, and to amend the Gender Equality Act accordingly, which had entered into force in 1999. The new legal provisions on parental leave promote the compatibility of career and family, while the revision of occupational pension schemes has improved the situation of part-time employees.

With respect to violence against women and girls, both the revision of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which enhances the protection of victims, and the development of a Victims Assistance Act have contributed to the progress made. The goal of the amendment to the Criminal Procedure Code was to improve the legal standing of victims in criminal proceedings by establishing a procedural right to respectful treatment and the greatest possible protection. In particular, the interests of young victims and victims of sexual offenses will be better taken into account. One of the most important achievements of the legislative revision is protective questioning, in which the witness subject to protection is questioned in a separate room from the perpetrator, so that the witness is not forced to face the perpetrator. In connection with the expanded right to refuse statements, this ensures that victims who are in particular need of protection must in general only appear before court once and are accordingly protected to the extent possible. In addition, the questioning especially of young witnesses will be transferred to experts who, by virtue of their training and professional experience, are able to keep the psychological burden on witnesses during questioning to a minimum.

Other legislative amendments in the interest of victims protection include the introduction of assistance to witnesses, which grants each witness contact with a confidant, the protection of privacy through explicit confidentiality requirements and prohibitions of publication, a more detailed specification of the content of the official duty to report crimes, and special aid, instruction, and information requirements, such as the possibilities of informing victims and their relatives of a release of a suspect from pretrial detention. In addition, the legislative revision includes detailed provisions on the exclusion of the public and the inadmissibility of television, radio, film, and photographic recordings in court.

The creation of the Victims Assistance Act concludes a three-phase overall project, which began with the amendment of sexual criminal law and was continued in the revision of the Code of Criminal Procedure with respect to victims' protection. Since most of the victims of the offenses to which these amendments are relevant are women or girls, the focus of this package of measures on improving the situation of victims constitutes an important step toward the actual realization of the principle of equality. The goal of the Victims Assistance Act, namely the best possible support for victims, will be achieved on the basis of the two pillars of "counseling" and "financial assistance".

The appropriate care of victims and their families is the most important objective of victims' assistance. For this purpose, a Victims Counseling Office is being created. Its goal is to provide the necessary assistance in individual cases with respect to medical, psychological, social, material, and legal needs or, if it cannot provide such assistance itself, to find appropriate providers and to give information on victims' assistance. Both urgent immediate help must be guaranteed around the clock, and longer-term assistance must be ensured. Currently, concepts are being developed for the practical implementation of counseling services, which will take into account the needs of victims of criminal offences, along with the efficient use of existing resources and available know-how.

In the area of financial assistance, both comprehensive legal aid and rights of compensation are provided for. Legal aid covers the actual cost of the proceedings for victims, such as court fees and expert fees, as well as free legal counsel, depending on the victim's financial situation. This is intended to help victims assert their claims against perpetrators as well as insurance companies, for instance.

In addition, these provisions are intended to enable victims to receive compensation from the State for material and non-material injury suffered, to the extent that no or only insufficient compensation is given by third parties. The compensation of non-material injuries is intended to express society's recognition of the difficult situation of the victim as part of comprehensive victims' protection, and especially to take into account the situation of victims of sexual offenses, who as a rule suffer hardly any material injuries, but usually grave non-material injuries. In contrast to compensation for loss of assets, non-material compensation will not be dependent on the income of the victim. Maximum amounts are specified for both forms of compensation.

These, Madame Chairperson, are just a few recent examples of how the Liechtenstein Government is responding to the need for concrete action to protect women and girls from discrimination and violence.

I thank you.