

**Statement by Ms. Lenita Toivakka****Minister for Foreign Trade and Development of Finland****Round-Table on Women and Girls: Catalyzing Action to Achieve Gender Equality****24.5.2016 klo 11.30-13.30****Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am delighted to have the opportunity to take part in this important roundtable.

Last October I visited the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. There I was able to see, experience and learn about the impacts of the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts. I met with women who had left everything and were struggling as refugees, girls who were born on the refugee camp and now went to school there – and the women hosting them in Jordanian local communities, struggling as well. Many lives have been touched by these and other conflicts. It was an acute reminder of the importance of our theme.

As we all know, women and girls are often the worst affected in today's multiple crises. Respecting their rights and needs should be at the center of humanitarian action. Gender equality and empowering women are instrumental for improving efficiency of humanitarian assistance. Yet, humanitarian programs too often pay insufficient attention to women's and girls' needs.

Promoting gender equality is a long-standing priority for Finland. It is a key issue in our development cooperation as well as in our humanitarian assistance. For us, human rights of women and girls are an overarching, non-negotiable framework that must be respected in all settings. In this regard, we welcome the Secretary General's Report One Humanity –Shared Responsibility and its strong emphasis on women's rights and gender equality in humanitarian crises.

Finland is committed to taking strong action to combat sexual and gender-based violence and empowering women as agents and leaders of change in humanitarian action. We continue to actively promote the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the landmark Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council. The implementation of this Resolution and ensuring that women have a central role in achieving sustainable peace is a key priority for the Finnish Government.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Finland continues to champion universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and adolescent girls, in refugee and other crisis settings. UN Women, United Nations Population Fund and Marie Stopes International are some of Finland's key partners in this work.

Within the spirit of leaving no one behind, Finland is determined to promote inclusion of women and girls into humanitarian action. Protection of women and girls with disabilities from violence and abuse is an issue that must be addressed across all humanitarian response sectors - as well as their meaningful inclusion. The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities into Humanitarian Action was launched here in Istanbul yesterday. Finland endorses the Charter and fully commits to its implementation. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all stakeholders to endorse it and thus contribute to our common goal "to leave no one behind".

It is crucial that gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment become standard principles of humanitarian action. For that reason, Finland requires that humanitarian organizations supported by Finnish funding incorporate gender equality into their policies and operations. Finland will actively advocate and use its leverage in the Executive Boards of UN Funds and Programmes as well as in the international financing institutions and other multilateral fora to this end.

Thank you for your attention.