

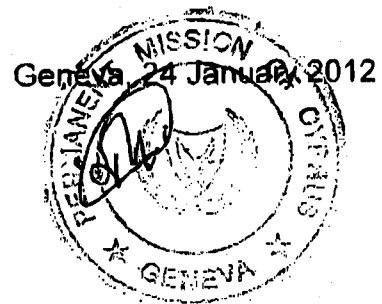


**Permanent Mission of the Republic of Cyprus  
Geneva**

Ref.: 24.11.006.013 (1000/1)

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Cyprus to the Office of the United Nations at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and with reference to the latter's Letter dated 8 December 2011, concerning the questionnaire on highlighting practices and significant legislative and policy reforms adopted for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality in times of political transition since the entry into force of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, by the Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practice, has the honour to enclose herewith the relevant information as received from the competent Authorities of the Republic of Cyprus.

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Cyprus to the Office of the United Nations at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland avails itself of the opportunity to renew to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.



To:  
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UN Office at Geneva,  
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Fax: 041 22 917 90 08  
(for the attention of Ms. Nathalic Stadclmann)

**OHCHR REGISTRY**

24 JAN 2012

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**(A) Constitutional and other legislative initiatives and reforms put in place to promote women's rights and gender equality, including through the revision and repeal of discriminatory provisions in legislation.**

1. During the last years, the legal framework safeguarding women's rights has been further improved, with a number of legislative provisions, particularly in the sphere of family, employment, violence and trafficking in women. Legal reform, aiming at the elimination of discrimination and the further safeguarding of women's rights in all fields has been pursued, bringing legislation in line with relevant international instruments; and in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

2. Cyprus is a state party to core international human rights instruments (U.N, Council of Europe and European Union), covering the principle of gender equality. During the last years, Cyprus has ratified the following:

- *the Convention concerning the revision of the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised) in 2004 [ Law 54 (III)/2004].*
- *the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights in 2005 [Law 23(III)/2005].*
- *the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in 2006 [ Law 6(III)/2006].*
- *the Convention of the Council of Europe on Action, Against Trafficking in Human Beings in 2007 [Law 38(III)/2007].*

3. Considerable legislative measures relating to gender equality were also enacted, e.g.:

- *The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Laws, 2007 and 2008 [L.109 (I)/2007, L.8 (I)/2008 and L. 43(I)/2008] extending the maternity leave from 16 to 18 weeks.*

- *The Parental Leave and Leave on Grounds of Force Majeure (Amendment) Law, 2007 [L.111(I)/2007] amending L.69 (I)/2002 to clarify that the total period of parental leave is 13 weeks per child even in the cases of multiple births, as well as specifying that the employee is protected from termination of his/her employment upon applying or taking parental leave, for the period starting on the day of application until the end of the parental leave period. The Law was further amended by L.11(I)/2010, to improve its functions and encourage both parents, especially fathers to make use of it through extending the right of parental leave until the child reaches the age of 8, or in case of children with disabilities, the age of 18, the extension of the annual maximum period of parental leave for each*

parent, the right of the father to parental leave immediately after the birth/adoption of a child, the right of the father to transfer two weeks of the total duration of his parental leave to the mother.

*-The Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings and the Protection of Victims Law, 2007 [L.87 (I)/2007]* in the field of violence against women.

*-The Equal Treatment between Men and Women (Access to and Supply of Goods and Services) Law, 2008 [L.18 (I)/2008]*, transposing the EU Directive 2004/113/EC, implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services.

**(B) Strengthening the framework of state institutions, machineries and mechanisms to implement actions in order to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women.**

The National Machinery for Women's Rights, as well as other bodies/structures and national institutions have been put in place in order to promote gender equality and eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women.

**(1) National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR)**

(i) The NMWR is the competent authority in Cyprus for the promotion of gender equality and women's rights. It was established in February 1994 by the Council of Ministers, is administratively placed under the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and is under the chairmanship of the Minister of Justice and Public Order.

(ii) The NMWR is a system of four bodies, i.e. the Council, the National Committee, the Interministerial Committee and the General Secretariat, in which governmental officers from all ministries, women's organizations and other NGO's participate.

The NMWR deals with all matters concerning women, focusing on the elimination of legal discrimination against women and the promotion of real equality between men and women.

(iii) The main objectives of the NMWR are:

- Law reform
- Elimination of stereotypes relating to the roles of men and women in society and changing of social attitudes
- Increase of the participation of women in political and public life and in decision-making positions

- Development of women's awareness about their rights and the promotion of public awareness about gender equality
- Prevention and combating of all forms of violence against women
- Support and funding of women's organizations
- Mobilization of the governmental sector, so as to incorporate gender equality in all policy fields and programmes (gender mainstreaming).

(iv) The NMWR plays a leading role in ensuring the introduction of gender mainstreaming in all national policies and programmes. The NMWR also participates in a number of multidisciplinary committees under other Ministries dealing with issues such as family, children, violence against women, trafficking, social inclusion, employment and contributes substantially in ensuring a gender perspective in the formulation and implementation of relevant policies.

(v) A National Action Plan on Gender Equality, initiated by the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR) was adopted by the Council of Ministers in August 2007. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2007-2013) is significant in that it incorporates a holistic approach to gender equality addressing six priority areas, namely: employment, education, decision-making, social rights, violence and gender stereotypes.

## (2) Ombudsman / Anti-Discrimination Body and Equality Authority

(i) As of May 2004, the Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman) was appointed by law the competent body (an independent authority) to deal with and decide upon discrimination matters in Cyprus. As a result, two separate Authorities were created, namely the Cyprus Anti-Discrimination Body and the Equality Authority, which together comprise the "Cyprus Equality Body".

(ii) The Anti-Discrimination Body investigates complaints of discrimination on all grounds, in relation to access to goods and services, social security, social protection schemes, education and health care, while the Equality Authority investigates complaints on the grounds of sex in the area of employment and vocational training, including sexual harassment, implementation of maternity protection and rights, discrimination in access to employment and employment and working conditions (including dismissal and pay). In 2008, the Equality Authority expanded its mandate further to cover the Equal Treatment of Men and Women (Access to Goods and Services) Law of 2008.

(iii) From May 2004 until the end of 2010, 230 complaints regarding possible violations of the equality principle in relation to sex were submitted to the Equality Authority. These complaints, concerned discriminations due to pregnancy, delivery of a baby, motherhood or family situation as well as discriminations on

hiring, promotion, payments, professional training and sexual harassment. 17 complaints regarding discrimination on the grounds of sex were filed to the Anti-Discrimination Body.

**(3) Gender Equality Committee in Employment and Vocational Training (GECEVT)**

In 2009, the GECEVT was further strengthened by adding to its powers the provision of independent assistance to victims of discrimination. This includes giving legal advice and legal representation for victims of discrimination in judicial or administrative procedures. Furthermore, the staff of the Committee was strengthened with the addition of an Administrative Officer and an Expert Advisor. Lastly, *the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Occupational Training (Amendment) Law of 2009, [L. (39(I)/2009]* added elements of further independence in the GECEVT's mandate, allowing it to decide on and control more freely matters relating to its better operation.

**(4) Equality Inspectors-Department of Labour/Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance**

Since July 2008, the Equality Inspectors underwent targeted legal training relating to discrimination issues and became active in the investigation of complaints. The Equality Inspectors' knowledge of the law and their practical experience in the examination of complaints has grown considerably.

**(5) Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence (ACPCDV)**

The ACPCDV continues to work intensively in order to monitor the implementation of the relevant law on family violence and to raise awareness among professionals and the public in generally. During the last years, the ACPCDV has been very active and has played a vital role in raising awareness, carrying out research, strengthening interdepartmental cooperation, monitoring implementation of the relevant law, evaluating existing services, providing training to relevant professionals and most importantly, in developing the National Action Plan on Prevention and Handling of Family Violence (NAPPHFV), which was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2009.

**(6) Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (MCGCTHB)**

The purpose of the MCGCTHB is, among others, to monitor the implementation of the relevant Law, as well as to take all necessary measures, to monitor and evaluate the national referral mechanism of the victims and to collect and exchange information with regard to the offences provided by the Law. The

MCGCTHB is comprised of the Minister of Interior, as President, who is also the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and representatives of the Law Office of the Republic, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order (MJPO), the NMWR, the Police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Department of Labour, the Social Welfare Services (SWS), the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), the Civil Registry and Migration Department, the Asylum Service and two Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) and STIGMA).

**(C) Improving women's political participation, on equal terms with men, in the transitional and post-transitional process at all levels of decision-making, including the adoption of temporary special measures.**

1. Balanced participation of women and men in political life continues to be high on the agenda of the NMWR. In 2006, as part of its campaign for more women in politics, the NMWR has drawn the attention of the leaders of the political parties to the Recommendation of the Council of Europe Rec. 2003(3) on Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Life. This Recommendation, translated into Greek and widely distributed in the form of a booklet by the NMWR, gave rise to lively debate on various measures including positive actions in the field of public and political life.
2. The NMWR through its Subcommittee on the Participation of Women in Decision-Making Positions, in view of the Parliamentary and Local Authorities elections of 2006, launched a campaign, partly devoted to contacts/meetings with the leaders of all political parties, to discuss positive action measures to accelerate *de facto* equality in political life. These contacts and discussions were widely covered by the Media. The campaign included contacts with the Mass Media in an effort to give visibility to women's issues and women candidates, especially during the pre-election period. The NMWR came to an agreement with the major media owners/directors for the screening of a TV spot urging citizens to vote both genders. In addition, the NMWR subsidized the production of a short film on the same lines to be used by NGOs and the Media, during the pre-election period. A booklet for Women in 2006 Parliamentary Elections was also prepared by the NMWR and widely distributed.
3. The NMWR, in view of the Local Elections of 2006, implemented a European programme on «Women in Local Authorities», which included meetings of women candidates, in all major cities with the general public, giving them the

opportunity to present their commitments and vision, regarding the role of the local authorities in addressing gender equality issues.

4. In view of the Euro-Parliamentary Elections of 2009 the NMWR had lend its support to the European Women's Lobby to a campaign for promoting the election of women.

5. The said Subcommittee of the NMWR, in view of the Parliamentary and Local Elections of 2011, organized in October 2010 a Seminar on «Positive Action Measures and Good Practices in European Union Regarding the Advancement of Women in Public and Political Life», with keynote speaker Ms. Eva-Britt Svensson, Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality and continued its campaign in 2011, aiming at increasing the number of women in Parliament as well as in Local Councils. The campaign included contacts with political leaders, informative seminars and collaboration with the Mass Media in order to contribute in this direction.

6. NGOs have been very active in recent years in promoting the participation of women in political and public life, and to this end, have organized campaigns and seminars and carried out research in this area, often with the support of the NMWR. A research study of particular interest was on the gender preferences of the Cypriot electorate during the 2006 elections, carried out by the Cyprus Gender Research Centre.

7. The Union of Municipalities, in order to respond to the issue of underrepresentation of women in public life, established, in February 2005, the Committee of Elected Women of the Union of Municipalities. The Committee's objectives include the promotion of equality and equal representation of men and women in local life through the participation of women in the local councils. Specifically, they campaign for the signing of the European Charter on Gender Equality in Local Authorities by all Municipalities. Based on that, the Municipality of Nicosia has developed its own Plan of Action on Gender Equality (2010-2012), in line with the NAPGE (2007-2013).

8. Towards this direction, most political parties have introduced the quota system to favour the participation of women in their decision-making bodies. Some have also quotas for their candidate lists. This has been made possible through the parties' memorandum/constitution and not through legislation. In addition, under the NAPGE and in particular under its special chapter on the "Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political/Social and Economic life", measures for the introduction of targets and quotas have been included, such as the target of 40% for the participation of women in political life, quota of 30% for women in

ballots in local, parliamentary and euro-parliamentary elections, and a quota of 30% for women in the appointments in all public committees and boards. These are discussed with the civil society at various fora, taking into account the critical perception regarding the use of quotas prevailing in Cyprus, even among women's organizations.

9. The Statistical Service of Cyprus (CYSTAT) is the competent authority responsible for the compilation and the publication of most of the official statistical data in Cyprus and its aim is to provide reliable and up-to-date statistical information. The NMWR gives great visibility to those statistical data through its webpage, reports, publications, informative leaflets, campaigns and speeches made by the Minister and the Permanent Secretary of the MJPO and the Secretary General of the NMWR on various occasions.

10. The Statistical Portrait of Women in Cyprus (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2008) which provides gender disaggregated data for all sectors including employment, education, health, poverty, and public life will soon be updated and republished.