

Joint CND & CCPCJ virtual event “BEIJING+25: REALIZING GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS” - 12/06/2020

Commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and discussing how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting women and girls

SPEAKING POINTS

Mister Chair,

First of all, thank you for inviting me to speak today. Normally I've would have met you all a bit earlier in March, but due to Covid19-crisis, I had other obligations in Belgium. I would like to congratulate the CND for the adoption, at Belgium's initiative, of the resolution 63/3 on ensuring the availability and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, which has increased in relevance as a result of the COVID19-crisis.

As Minister of Equal Opportunities, I attach great importance to the fight against gender-based violence, and sexual violence in particular. This is also an absolute priority in the concrete implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to achieving gender equality.

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this attention for **gender**

equality becomes even more crucial. Clear and effective actions have to be taken.

- The commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remain a good starting point to see which actions the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, but also the member states, can take.
- Concerning preventive programmes that promote women's health for example, the commission should ask the question how the current pandemic has affected drug prevention programmes and drug consumption, all the while taking into account the gender perspective.
- Another very important link that should be analysed is the link between alcohol and drug consumption, lockdown measures and domestic violence. Are the impact of the lockdown on substance abuse and the consequences of that for domestic violence taken into account? And are there measures in place to counter a possible negative effect of a decreased follow-up of drug rehabilitation programmes on the situation at home?
- A second concrete suggestion relates to the objective of the Beijing Platform for Action to eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence of prostitution and trafficking. The quarantine

measures put in place during the COVID-19 crisis, made it harder for **human trafficking victims** to escape or find help. It is therefore important that enough resources stay available for services such as shelters.

In Belgium, our newly created comprehensive **Sexual Assault Care Centers**, where victims can receive medical and psychological care while undergoing a forensic examination and can file a complaint, are an important step forward in that regard. In two years' time, these multidisciplinary centres have already proven their merit as 2.500 integrated interventions have already taken place. This is more than twice the initially estimated case load! During the lockdown of the Covid19 crisis, the Federal Sexual Assault Referral Centres remain, in this time of crisis, open and operational, 24/24 and 7/7.

An Inter-ministerial Conference which gathers all competent ministers of the federal and federate states, has taken place, on the topic of "Violence against Women and Quarantine Measures". The purpose of this Conference is to pursue a coordinated policy. It discussed the government measures which are currently in place to deal with partner violence.

- Finally, it is important to learn and improve. The world was not prepared for this crisis, and it is clear that the specific situations of women and men have very often not been taken into account in the reactions to it. We now need to ensure on the one hand that the COVID-19 crisis will not undo the progress that has been made, but on the other hand, we also need to commit ourselves to do better, even when this crisis comes to an end. Only when the gender perspective is thoroughly integrated in our actions and processes in a non-crisis environment, do we stand a chance to provide gender-responsive reactions in case of another crisis.

Thank you for your attention.