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Statement of Finland at the Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Doha, 12-19 April 2015

High-level segment

Mr/Ms Chairperson,

1. Finland welcomes the 13th UN Crime Congress as a meeting for the exchange of views and experiences. I am confident that the Congress will come up with suggestions to be taken up by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. Finland acknowledges the legacy and significant role of the United Nations Congresses as one of the most important fora for the exchange of views and experiences in within criminal policy.

2. I would like to identify three issues which are not only of concern to many of our countries, but are issues in which Finland may have something to contribute to our debate. These are rule of law within the wider agenda of the United Nations, the role of the United Nation's standards and norms, especially in relation to the use imprisonment, and finally, the challenge of prison overcrowding.

3. Mr. Chairperson, the issues of sustainable development, eradication of poverty and reduction of social inequality have always been high in the agenda of the United Nations, but the emphasis has not been in the issues of the rule of law. It has been only recently acknowledged, that crime prevention and criminal justice systems, in respect of the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, play a crucial role for the promotion of these goals. Finland is a good example of that. Rule of law has had a large impact on the development of the country from a poor war-torn rural society to what it is today: an egalitarian, secure and prosperous welfare state. Globally, we believe that the rule of law constitutes an important element in the post-2015 development agenda. The agenda which should be based on our joint international commitments to human rights.
4. The draft post-2015 agenda focuses on equal and full access to justice services for everybody with no discrimination as well as equal treatment and equal opportunity. Providing access to justice is dependent on the existence of clear and qualitative legal frameworks in line with international standards, ensuring institutional capacity, sufficient resources and independence of the judiciary. Access to justice also requires legal empowerment and legal awareness of all, including the poor and members of minorities.

5. Mr Chairperson, United Nation’s *standards and norms* have a significant role to play in the global effort to effectively address both crime prevention and criminal justice issues. Although standards and norms are not binding legally they are morally strong and provide practical guidance to States in their conduct. Their value lies in their acceptance by a large number of States. They may be seen as goals, practices and strategies broadly adopted by the international community. Therefore we should continue to place a priority on their further development.

6. In our opinion, the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners are very important in complementing national legislation and international conventions. Their significance is widely accepted. Finland welcomes the work of the Open-ended Intergovernmental Expert Group on the Revision of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. It is important to revise the SMR’s in the areas agreed at the meetings of the Commission of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice during past years. The existing Rules – first time adopted in 1955 - are in some respects outdated and even in contradiction with binding human rights conventions. Rules should be reviewed so that the they reflect the latest advances in correctional science and good practices, without at the same time lowering any existing standards. It is important that the United Nation’s Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) could base its work on updated and universally accepted international standards.

7. Mr. Chairperson, Finland has addressed the challenge of *prison overcrowding* through effective criminal justice policy. The number of prisoners per capita has declined so that this now is one of lowest in the world. The prison population was halved during 1960’s and -70’s due to the consistent policy of lowering of the sanctioning scales and widening the use of alternative sanctions such as the suspended sentences and the fines.
Later on in 1990's and thereafter community sanctions have been widely used. We in Finland have clearly found that the effects of community sanctions are less harmful than those of imprisonment. It is also important to mention that the enforcement of criminal sanctions is carried out so that it supports the sentenced persons' individual growth and development as well as their intention to lead a life without crime.

8. Finally, Mr Chairperson, I would like to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to express the views of the Government of Finland and I'm looking forward to the results of these discussions. In closing, I would also like to express my gratitude to the Government of Qatar for the generous hospitality and for the excellent facilities provided for the Thirteenth Congress.