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«Women's Contribution to Justice and Common Challenges»
Women's Regional Judges and Prosecutors Conference

Monday, 19th of May 2017

Dear participants, dear guests,

Let me first thank the organizers for arranging this regional conference on Women Judges and Prosecutors. It is a great pleasure to be here!

This is an important event focusing on two main Norwegian priorities: The rule of law and gender equality. These two areas will continue to be key priorities in the years to come. Without continuous efforts, it is even a risk of sliding back and developments going in the wrong direction.

Norway has for many years been a strong supporter of the strengthening of rule of law, anti-corruption and human rights in the Balkans. Any nation that wants progress should make rule of law priority number 1. Otherwise, it is not possible to achieve a true democracy, sound economic development and a fair society.

Norway has been committed to working with the Government of Kosovo towards reforms that will lead to an efficient, transparent, independent, and accountable legal system.

When it comes to gender equality and equal opportunities, the overriding objective must be that women are represented on an equal basis in all strands of society, have equal opportunities and enjoy real influence in decision-making processes. We strongly believe that gender equality makes any society stronger, more productive and fair. This also goes for equal employment opportunities in the justice sector.

Let me mention some milestones in Norway in this regard:



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In 1884, Maren Cathrine Dahl became the first female student to study law and graduate in Norway. In 2016, Toril Marie Øie was appointed the first woman to be Head of the Supreme Court in Norway.

Today, more female than male lawyers are being educated, contrary to what was previously the case. In most years since 2003, more women than men have been appointed positions in the justice sector.

In judicial positions in the primary courts it is today approximately 60% men and 40% women – whereas in 1999 the women's share was 22%. The proportion of women is somewhat higher in the primary courts than in the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal.

The «glass ceiling» is common metaphor referring to the invisible barriers that make it harder for women in society to reach the top. The glass ceiling may represent a challenge for women in many sectors. This may also be the case for Norway, although we take pride in having made substantial achievements.

There is still a misconception in some circles that women are somehow less equipped to function as prosecutors and judges. This is a harmful way of thinking. Not only does it create unnecessary barriers for women to be employed in the legal system, but it also deprives society from great legal competence.

Key measures to promote women representation are: 1) education, 2) transparency in recruitment processes, 3) sometimes women quotas. Beyond this, there is no “one-size-fits-all”. What works in one country, may not work in another. Some argue for drastic measures, others believe changes should be more gradual.

Let me conclude, by wishing you the best of luck with this important conference. There is still a lot of unfinished business both in the area of rule of law and gender equality. I can assure you, that these will be two key priority areas for Norwegian engagement and support also in the years to come.