

ÁVARP UTANRÍKISRÁÐHERRA

**RAKARARÁÐSTEFNA Á VEGUM FORMENNSKU ÍSLANDS Í  
EYSTRASALTSRÁÐINU OG NORRÆNU  
RÁÐHERRANEFNDARINNAR**

NORRÆNA HÚSINU, 23. MAÍ 2017

Dear guests,

I would like to welcome you all today to this first Barbershop event to be held in Iceland. We are all here because we want to contribute to a more gender equal world and we want to be **proactive** in the fight against gender-based violence in its many forms.

Gender equality is one of the corner stones of Icelandic foreign policy and a **priority** in our **Presidency of the Council of Baltic Sea States**. Gender equality in and the engagement of men and boys is likewise a priority in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and we are pleased to be working together with them in organizing a series of Barbershops in the Nordic region.

But what is **the purpose** of a Barbershop event? Why is it important to encourage men to attend and to engage in this discussion?

Let's be very clear that it is **not** about excluding women – it is about **including men**.

The Barbershop concept was developed jointly by the Governments of Iceland and Suriname, to get men involved and committed **as partners** in promoting gender equality. Women have been leading the movement for gender equality for decades, and it is essential that men and boys get involved in ways that support existing efforts and leadership.

Currently, men at all levels of society are largely **missing** from this dialogue. I think one of the reasons is that we, men, sometimes feel out of our **comfort zone**; gender equality has been the domain of women for so long.

It is easy to assume that there are enough people already addressing the issue but the reality is that if we choose to remain on the sidelines, progress will be slow or worse; we may **go backwards**. It takes all of us to change social norms.

At the current pace, we will only reach gender equality in 2133 – **twothousand-onehundred-thirty-three** – we cannot wait this long, each and every one of us will need to contribute so that we can **accelerate progress**.

Over the past few decades, **increased respect** for women's human rights and their active economic and political participation has **raised wellbeing and prosperity** in Iceland. I believe that the Icelandic experience can be of value for others, which is why we are organizing Barbershops in many of the international fora available to us.

The entire UN membership has collectively agreed to aim for a gender equal world through our work towards the **Sustainable Development Goals**. By contributing internationally and sharing our story, we believe that we can nudge other countries to adopt **gender-responsive policies** so we reach the goals we have set ourselves globally.

While we usually approach women's rights from a human rights perspective, the economic case can easily be made:

Recent studies in **Norway** revealed that the growth in women's employment has contributed significantly to the **nation's wealth**. They found that if women's participation in the labour market **had not changed** in the time period 1972–2013, the accumulated **GDP loss** would have been roughly **EUR 350 billion**.

On the other hand, if women had worked **as many hours** as men for the entire period (1972–2013), **the gain in GDP** would have been almost **EUR 250 billion**.

Gender equality is not about creating a society that gives equal opportunities to women – by definition, it is about equal opportunity for men **and** women.

Iceland was a pioneer when it introduced **exclusive paternity leave** in 2000. It has changed norms and behavior in a meaningful way to enable men to fully participate in their children's lives. The generations before us could not be seen pushing a stroller – it wasn't **manly** enough.

Those same men were told not to cry, to man up and be strong. But we now know that this is **right out harmful**; we cannot live by some predetermined masculinities, we should all be free of stereotyping and discrimination.

These **social norms**, the ideas about what it means to be a man affect boys and men throughout their lifetime: men are less likely to see a doctor, they are less likely to talk about their feelings and more likely to commit suicide.

According to figures from UN Women **harmful masculinities** also affect women, as global estimates indicate that 1 in 3 women experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, mostly perpetrated by men and the majority of cases being intimate partner violence.

And this is **the topic** of our discussions today. We have a distinguished panel of high-ranking officials, experts and activists in the panel who every day work on violence prevention and promotion of gender equality.

Unfortunately, I cannot stay as I am traveling abroad, but I will be briefed on the discussions later so that we can build on it in our ongoing work, both internationally and in Iceland.

We **can** change the discourse among men to be more respectful towards women and actually, towards ourselves. We now know that being a man means **taking a responsibility**; responsibility for our health, for our children, for addressing our own unconscious bias and prejudice, and for calling out discrimination when we see it.

All of us have **so much to gain** from equality, both personally and as a society. I sincerely hope that the discussions here today will be informative in a way that will help us spread the message and, little by little, contribute to a less violent and more respectful society.