

# Taking Wing – Conference on Gender Equality and Women in the Arctic. Progress Report.

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Räsänen, Leila

Arctic Council Secretariat

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**Gender Equality Unit  
Ministry for Social Affairs and Health  
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**SAO2001/B/13.1.**

## **Taking Wing – Conference on Gender Equality and Women in the Arctic Progress Report**

### **Background**

The SAOs adopted in June 12-13, 2001 the Host Country's initiative to organise a conference on women in the Arctic in 2002. In the background paper the goals of the conference as well as themes, organisers and partners, participants and preparatory processes were preliminarily outlined. The SAOs also agreed to establish a reference group consisting of contact persons named by the Member States and Permanent Participants to assist the Host Country in organising the conference.

### **The Reference Group**

All Member Countries and two Permanent Participants have provided by the end of September 2001 the names of contact persons for the reference group. The composition of the reference group, contact addresses, and the mandate of the group are enclosed. The reference group is still open for those Permanent Participants who have not yet named their contact persons.

The reference group held its first meeting on October 3-5, in Rovaniemi, Finland. The progress report is mainly based on the outcomes of the first meeting.

### **General information**

The reference group agreed on the title of the conference to be Taking Wing. An explanatory subtitle could be e.g. Gender Equality and Women in the Arctic.

The conference takes place in August, 5-6 (Monday – Tuesday) 2002 in Saariselkä, Inari, Finland. The arrival days are August 3-4.

The closest airport to Saarselkä is in Ivalo, There are two connections daily to Helsinki, at the minimum.

### **Participants**

The number of participants: maximum 200

### **The target groups:**

Arctic Council Members states, Permanen Participants and Observers

Indigenous peoples' organisations  
 Non-governmental organizations including women's NGOs  
 Representatives of national and regional governments  
 Researchers  
 Other national and international organisations

**The conference languages** are English, Russian.

### **Methods of work in the Conference**

Working methods would be a plenary and working groups. There are three to four rooms available for the working groups. The auditorium allows 200 persons in the maximum.

### **Goals of the conference**

The primary goal of the conference is to promote the integration of the goal of gender equality in the activities of existing organisations and governmental institutions (= mainstreaming gender equality) The preparations for the conference should offer a channel for co-operation, dialogue and interaction between women's organisations and networks and official bodies. Indigenous peoples, indigenous women and diversity are a natural crosscutting feature in a conference for Arctic women.

### **Themes for the conference**

The preliminary themes given in the background paper adopted by the SAOs were further elaborated by the reference group. There was a general agreement to cut down the number of main themes from five to four. The issue of information society should be integrated in the remaining four themes.

The reference group suggested a number of subthemes under the main themes. The group also agreed that the list of subthemes would be open for additions, deletions or revisions by SAOs at the SAO's next meeting in Espoo in November 2001. The SAOs and the Permanent Participants are invited to indicate those subthemes their Governments and organisations would be interested in incorporating in the conference and which subthemes they would be willing to coordinate.

The suggested number of subthemes is probably too high to be dealt with in the conference. Some of the subthemes can be merged together later on or be dropped. Other subjects could be addressed through background papers without being raised for discussion at the conference.

The themes and subthemes proposed by the reference group are as follows:

#### **I Economic and employment policy, entrepreneurship, education and training**

In recent years various forms of support programs have been offered to women entrepreneurs. A sharing of experiences and a critical assessment of them is called for. Do the support programs result in empowerment of women entrepreneurs or their marginalization; e.g. reproduction of existing sex segregation in the labour market?

### Women with higher education

Women with higher education tend to migrate from the Arctic areas. They do not often find employment or establish enterprises of their own in the Arctic..

On the other hand there is a risk for labour shortage in education and health sector in the Arctic in the future. Do telework, knowledge based work, decentralisation or encouragement to start enterprises bring solution to the problem.

### Men in the public sector

Employment, entrepreneurship and self-subsistence in industries based directly on natural resources, such as fishing, reindeer herding, farming

E.g. women are employed by fisheries but not run them or own them, they do not reach to the “big money”. Do women lack equal opportunities in these industries?

### Women entrepreneurs in food production

Subsistence economy and the poorest of the poor. Policies to empower those with the least resources.

### Tourism and sustainable development, ecotourism.

Women are a multiple resource in the development of a tourism which would benefit local people while at the same time preserving the Arctic environment. Are women’s resources taken seriously in the development of new forms of tourism?

### Men and gender equality

To highlight the role of men in achieving equality between women and men. For example men’s views on gender issues and parenthood; positive examples and experiences.

### Reconciliation of work and family.

The problem of sharing family responsibilities in two breadwinners’ families in the Arctic conditions. Policies and best practices to encourage equal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men.

### Changes in public sector - consequences for men and women

Changes in public sector, e.g. gender impact of centralisation and privatisation of the public sector.

### New ways of organising public services in sparsely populated areas

How to maintain a high level of the welfare services when both the number of inhabitants and the budgets are decreasing. People still have high expectations of the quality of welfare services, the cost of producing these services is, however, high. A further issue is how to recruit people into the health/welfare sector in small/rural communities.

Employment, entrepreneurship and self-subsistence in industries based directly on natural resources, such as fishing, reindeer-herding and fish-farming.

How do women participate in the expanding fish-farming industry as owners, leaders, production workers?

## **II Gender Aspect in the Right to Self Determination of Indigenous People**

This theme will be further elaborated . Several aspects have been discussed by the reference group, including governance and politics, education, land ownership and use, as well as legislation.

### **III Health**

Maternal and infant mortality

Health problems of nursing mothers and infants

Gender aspects in control of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS.

Food contamination. The impact of persistent organic chemicals and other environmental contaminants in food chains to infants and nursing mothers

Gender aspects of psychosocial wellbeing, alcohol and drug misuse, suicides

Gender aspects of telemedicine. Can telemedicine enable Arctic mothers to give birth safely without having to travel long distances?

### **IV Women' s rights, violence against women and trafficking in women**

Equal rights and equal access of indigenous women to economic resources including traditional industries

Violence against women in the Arctic – A need to break the taboo of not speaking about it

Experiences of the cross-sectoral service system in crisis management

Incest problem in Arctic societies

Trafficking in women and prostitution

### **Further steps in the conference preparation**

A third version of themes and subthemes will be worked out by the secretariat taking into account the comments given by the SAO's meeting in November.

Co-ordinators for subthemes and/or experts concerning the subthemes will be named

The goal of mainstreaming gender equality in the existing public bodies, organisations and institutions in the Arctic including the Arctic Council is a great challenge with special consequences to the conference preparations. It means e.g. that the target groups and relevant actors shall be identified and contacted early in the preparatory process. They should be invited to start/ to continue considering their own activities from a gender perspective. The subthemes of the conference can be regarded as points of departure in gender mainstreaming. The relevant actors e.g. public institutions,

authorities, and researchers as well as individual women, including indigenous women, and men can be asked to define the problems ,to consider the solutions and to share best practices.

The reference group discussed some examples of the Finnish ad hoc working group which contributes in the conference preparations in the Finnish Arctic Area. The group has discussed some subthemes, identified various key actors, and responsible public authorities and invited them to participate in the preparation by writing short papers on the relevant subthemes.

It was agreed that this kind of a regional or subregional process could be one way of encouraging a dialogue between different actors and of raising consciousness of the gender aspect in Arctic policies. This kind of approach is, however, time consuming and puts pressure to the contact persons and to possible co-ordinators of subthemes. Therefore the approach must be flexible and pragmatic.

### **Next meetings of the reference group**

The following dates are suggested:

18 alternatively 21 of January in Helsinki

22-23 alternatively 25-26 April

2-3 August in Saariselkä

### **MANDATE OF THE REFERENCE GROUP *(as set forth in SAO2001/A/14)***

To assist the organisers to reach the relevant partners, including women's networks and organisations to participate in the conference preparations;

To prepare the conference program;

To prepare the conference information plan;

To recruit the participants;

To construct the conference preparations with a view to mainstreaming gender equality into relevant national and international bodies and implementing of the conference results.

The Host country invites the reference group to meetings and takes care of the secretarial services. However, travelling costs of the members cannot be funded by Host country.