Your Majesties, Excellencies, Fellow Participants,

Nations of the world will only prosper and develop when using the talents and competence of **all their citizens.** There is clear scientific evidence that the participation of women and girls in education, work life and the economy - along with boys and men, **makes a significant difference** **in GNP, effectiveness, innovation and competitive edge**.

The right to gainful work and a wage to sustain your own life, is a basic human right, along with the right to political participation, regardless of your gender. **The freedom for men and women alike,** to have careers **and** families; not to be forced to choose **”either – or”,** is basic to modern society.

Norway has worked on making enabling policies and structures since the 1960’s and thus empowered women and girls to be **visible** in the labour market, to be eligable to high positions in board-rooms as well as to compete for top management jobs in private and public sectors. The political participation of women is quite high, with parity in Cabinet, 39,7 % in Parliament as well as average in the 430 municipal councils. 80 % of the women work, and the fertility rate is 1.98, among the highest in developed economies.

The road to decisions on family policies and gender equality,has been, and still is, long .**Value decisions, as these always are**, create vivid political discussions and would not carry through Parliament without the support from women’s NGO’s, consultations and negotiations with the Social Partners (Employers and Employees’ federations), solid social science and economic research - and now: men’s voices, as well.

Reaching for equality is not done without long-time systematic work. Changing images, cultures and traditions **reproducing inquality, takes time. We must identify and alter unwanted stereotypes of womanhood, fatherhood and parenthood, even of”Norwegianhood”** (since equality also includes the equal treatement of immigrants and refugeees)

The most significant measures taken the last 20 years, have clearly been: Expanding the Parental Leave Scheme to 46 or 56 weeks with 10 weeks mandatory quota for fathers (”Choose or loose”), full coverage of early child care places (up to 6 years of age) to an affordable price, flexibility in work life and working hours for parents with young children, legal requirements for gender balance in several types of companies, hereunder the Public LTC’s (the listed ones) and the striving for equal pay for work of equal value, regardless of your gender or ethnic origin.

All of this clearly pays off, in economic terms. Other nations with large oil revenues, did **not choose** to invest in equality; Norway did.

However, we still have one of the most gender segregated labour markets in the world, due to historical reasons; this means less flexibility and is not economic sustainable in the long run. This is a future challenge !

Thank you !