



PLATAFORMA PORTUGUESA
PARA OS DIREITOS
DAS MULHERES

42nd CEDAW Session
PORTUGAL

Intervention of the
Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights
at the informal session with NGO's
27th October 2008

Madame Chair,

I'm Ana Costa and I'm representing the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights.

We would first like to stress that some very positive developments have been taking place in Portugal regarding the condition of women. We underline two: the decriminalization of abortion, in the aftermath of a referendum held in 2007; and the approval, in 2006, of the Parity Law (enforcing quotas of a minimum of one third of women and men candidates in electoral lists), which is expected to boost the participation of women in Parliament and City Councils in the forthcoming elections.

Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go in these and other areas of social life. What follows is a brief summary of the main points of the shadow report, presented by my colleague Vera Fonseca.

- 1. National mechanisms for equality and the visibility of women's human rights, and women's rights NGOs;**
- 2. Health and reproductive rights;**
- 3. Political participation;**
- 4. Employment;**
- 5. Education; and**
- 6. Violence against women.**

1. The current situation regarding the national mechanisms for equality and their relation with the organized civil society. We can summarize this relationship by stating two major trends:

- The growing lack of cooperation between governmental mechanisms for equality and non-governmental women's rights organisations**
- The growing organizational feebleness and disempowerment of Portuguese NGO in this field**



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The law which created the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (the new national mechanism for equality) extended its fields of action in order to cover other forms of discrimination under an umbrella-type concept of citizenship. This approach raises the strong concern that discrimination against women will be diluted among other types of discrimination, therefore losing sight of its structural, cross-cutting nature and of the specific forms that discrimination against women can assume. In other words, instead of mainstreaming gender in other areas of discrimination, these other areas are being mainstreamed via the gender equality mechanism.

The NGOs Consultative Council, as a specialized expertise forum for women's human rights and gender equality was, in practice, extinguished, thereby losing the possibility of leveraging the accumulated knowledge of 30 years of joint work. The restructuring of the NGOs Consultative Council of the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality took place according to criteria that, reflecting its enlargement of competencies, left out some relevant women's rights such as the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights.

Further compounding this situation, Women's Rights NGOs are increasingly facing financial difficulties. Although financial resources allocated by the European Social Fund were comparatively higher than the governmental annual subvention granted to these NGOs, they had to compete with much larger, long professionalized and long government-supported NGOs of other sectors. Some NGOs from other sectors changed their Statutes and Bylaws to be eligible for funding introducing equality between women and men, regardless of whether or not they pay attention to equality both in their internal system of government and external intervention and action - and, therefore, long professionalized NGOs from other sectors will benefit from funding that was meant to empower women's rights civil society organizations' and intervention in all critical issues concerning women's advancement and equality.

2. In the health and reproductive rights field, for example, family planning is still not readily available to large segments of the population, particularly young women. And



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despite the legalization of abortion, there are some State Hospitals where the doctors refuse to practice abortion, under the figure of “conscientious objector”, permitted by the law. There is no clear data on the number of hospitals where the law is actually being put into place.

3. In the field of political participation, despite the expected increase in the number of women engaged in political activity, lack of equality between women and men at decision-making levels in all spheres is still conspicuous, both because of the difficulties in balancing work and family life and because of deep-rooted prejudices against women's capacities.

4. In the field of employment, the glass ceiling is still operating. When looking for their first job, graduated women take twice longer than men with the same education. The same happens to women that are unemployed and looking for a new occupation, regardless of their education level. A gender pay gap still persists and is particularly wide in the higher levels of qualification. The burden of maternity is still an issue for the majority of women. There is a growing urgency in sensitizing employers on the benefits and modalities of reconciliation of private, family and professional life for both women and men.

5. Much remains to be done as well as in the critical field of education. Despite some positive measures, gender equality policies have not yet been mainstreamed in the educational sector. Research has shown that gender stereotypes persist in curricula and materials.

6. There is growing evidence that forms of violence against women (namely domestic violence) are increasing in Portugal, both in the number of cases and in the degree of violence they assume. And the legal and organizational framework of these crimes does not facilitate the position of women. Judicial proceedings are very slow. Sentences hardly ever protect women, and the number of existing shelters is



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insufficient most of the time by misuse of these facilities for social situations other than domestic violence.

There is also a lack of support for women trafficked for sexual exploitation, such as shelters, legal and psychological support, education and vocational training. It is essential to allocate resources for this purpose. At the moment some NGOs provide these services (namely psychological support and housing) but lack sufficient funds to do it.

We make these remarks in the hope that women's condition in Portugal will improve and in the hope that a re-empowered organized civil society can emerge in the forthcoming, crucial years.