



14th International Helvi Sipilä Seminar

MY BODY IS MINE - how free contraception is linked to empowerment and education

Thursday, 14 March 2019, 10 – 11.15 am

Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations, 605 Third Avenue, 35 Floor, N.Y.

TERHI HEINILÄ, Secretary General, National Council of Women of Finland

Mme Ambassador, distinguished guests,

dear friends,

I have the pleasure to wish you all warmly welcome to join the 14th International Helvi Sipilä Seminar.

The theme today is **My Body is Mine - How free contraception is linked to empowerment and education.**

In Finland we have a strong women's movement and a close cooperation with politicians, as well as with the ministries in charge in order to promote women's rights and gender equality.

This seminar is organized together by the Finnish Federation of Graduate Women, the National Council of Women, the Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations, Finland National Committee for UN Women and the Young Women's Christian Association of Finland.

My name is Terhi Heinilä and I represent the National Council of Women.

I have the pleasure to thank the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, as well as the Permanent Mission of Finland to the UN for the excellent cooperation and the opportunity to gather here in these premises with such a beautiful view over New York.

Unfortunately, in the past few years, we have experienced a backlash towards gender equality all around the world. According to UN Women it will take 270 years in order to reach gender equality! We simply cannot wait that long.

One of the key topics in terms of women's rights is sexual and reproductive health and rights. 214 million women globally would want to have access to safe and effective forms of contraception. However, multiple issues prevent women from obtaining contraceptives, such a lack of knowledge on different forms of contraceptives and how to use them effectively, as well high costs.

Globally, the women's movement is shocked at the latest developments in this area.

President Trump has stated that women should be punished for abortion. He has also proposed a change to the famous Title X (which is withholding money from any facility or program that promotes abortion or refers patients to a caregiver that will provide one). He ordered the "global gag rule", which denies funding from any international NGO that provides



abortion services or even discusses abortion with patients seeking educational materials or referrals. This affects not only sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls globally, but also their treatment of serious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV.

Conservative values have risen also in Europe. For example, the **Agenda Europe** movement wants to restore the Natural Order in Europe and seeks to overturn existing laws on basic human rights related to sexuality and reproduction specifically on issues such as abortion, sexual minorities and divorce. It is estimated that there are 500 similar interest groups all around Europe.

Women's right to decide over their own body is a basic human right. If we do not have that power, then what can we decide?

As a protest to the backlash millions of women have marched around the world. Only in the US in one year 5 million people participated in these rallies.

This session is our march today, to bring this important issue to the forefront and to our shared discussion today.

Helvi Sipilä was a Finnish lawyer and the first female Assistant Secretary-General of the UN. She was known especially as a respected advocate for gender equality and women's rights.

I did not know her personally, but I had a chance to meet her a few times. One of these occasions I recall especially well. It was the year 2000 and we, the Finnish women organized the European Women and Sport Conference and a preparatory high-level meeting, in which both the Assistant Secretary-General **Helvi Sipilä** and President **Tarja Halonen** participated.

President Halonen had just been elected as the first female President of the Republic of Finland. She was not able to speak, as she had just lost her voice after the presidential campaigning and celebrations. Helvi's health, unfortunately, was in a poor state at that time and she was walking quite slowly. Still, those two women had so much strength and courage and such a powerful voice which we will never forget.

I'm sure that Helvi Sipilä would have loved to join us here today to discuss the theme of the seminar: My body is mine. We feel privileged to have the opportunity to continue her valuable legacy, the legacy of global women.

With these words, please feel a warm welcome to this session My Body is Mine.