

Official Opening of the 41st Convention of the WWCTU

Greetings

Terhi Heinilä, Secretary General for the National Council of Women of Finland

THE SPEECH

Esteemed President Margaret Østenstad, national President Sinikka Vilén, representatives of the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union and its member organizations, dear friends,

It is with great appreciation to have the opportunity to bring a greeting on behalf of the National Council of Women of Finland - and a privilege to join you all in this opening of the 41st Convention of the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union. It is such a great honor for us in women's movement to have your important organization to gather in Helsinki and to meet such a large number of your active, devoted and global women here today.

My name is Terhi Heinilä and I work as Secretary General for the National Council of Women of Finland.

The National Council of Women of Finland, founded in 1911 by the first female parliamentarians in the world, is an umbrella organization for 60 women's organizations with over 400 000 members, 20 per cent of all women of Finland. 12 of the member organizations have been established more than a 100 years ago and 27 of them more than 75 years ago.

We are an active advocate of women's rights, women's human rights and gender equality and effectively linked into the Finnish society. The European Women's Lobby and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women are important international platforms and lead our work further.

The women's movement has a central role to play and gender equality is regarded a key success factor for our society.

A history in active women's civic advocacy can be seen in the long time and strongly ongoing co-operation between the National Council of Women and the Finnish White Ribbon Union. For example, in 1916 the National Council established a committee to support the work of the White Ribbon Union. A few years later, in 1919, the White Ribbon Union joined the National Council of Women and with this notion, continues to be one of the most long-standing member organizations. Together we have achieved historically important improvements for the women in Finland.

As an example, in 1923, proposed by the White Ribbon Union the first course for women police officers was arranged. It brought together 25 women officers to learn more about the work of a police. This was truly a historic joint action!

Close co-operation includes the participation of the White Ribbon Union in "100 years of women's voices and actions" exhibition to celebrate the 100 years of women's right to vote in Finland. As well as, participation in the Gender Equality acts program organized by the National Council in 2017 with community art workshops advancing cultural equality and accessibility.

The strength of women's organizations has always been in close collaboration. We greatly value our joint history, and we shall continue our joint efforts for women's rights in the future, just as we have done since years past.

Distinguished guests,

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. The World Economic Forum's 2018 Gender Gap Index report ranks Finland the world's fourth best gender-equal country. However, statistics do not necessarily mean that gender equality in all sectors of society has been achieved.

Finland's parliamentary election was held last April and the results were, in our perspective, delightful. For the first time 47 per cent women were elected as Members of Parliament and there are more women than ever as chairs in the Parliamentary Committees. Furthermore, in the newly established government 11 out of 18 ministers are women including 6 female ministers under 35 years old. We have lobbied actively and we are pleased to tell that gender equality has been strongly taken into account in the new government program. And for the first time ever, Finland has proposed a woman for the position of the EU commissioner.

Dear friends,

The National Council of Women of Finland is delighted to have such a long term, influential and stable women's wealth advocate as the White Ribbon Union as a member organization. Thank you for all your inspiration and resilient efforts to provide support and services to all women, also when facing challenges in life.

As said, when we exclude women, everyone pays the price, when we include women, the whole world wins. We feel privileged to have the opportunity to continue the legacy of global women in this important occasion.

With these words, I wish you all an excellent convention.