



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

Statement by Norway on Gender Equality in the Military – Universal Conscription

As delivered by Anders Dalaaker,
Military Adviser to the Permanent Delegation of Norway to the OSCE
to the Forum for Security Co-operation
Vienna, 8 March 2017

Mr Chairperson, Distinguished colleagues and panelists.

Norway has a proud heritage of pioneering the advancement of women. Universal suffrage was introduced as early as in 1913. Norway also has one of the highest rates in the world for women's participation in the work place. Norway had the world's first female submarine commander in 1992, the first female UN force commander and recently we got our first female chief of the Air Force.

At the same time, we have learned that gender equality does not happen automatically. Constant vigilance must be exercised, and Norway still has much to address, both within the armed forces and in society. For instance, we need a better gender balance in many of our professions and work places – the armed forces included - as well as in leadership and boardrooms. Often, cultural bias in the work place, such as in the armed forces, is not particularly favorable to women.

Research for almost a decade has provided more knowledge than before about women in the armed forces. We are therefore in a better position to influence and change the situation.

Distinguished colleagues.

A major structural change was found for Norway when introducing universal conscription.

Universal conscription, approved in principle by the Norwegian Parliament in 2013, with legislation passed in 2014, being implemented august last year has once more given Norway pioneer status in the field of gender equality. This is a wide-ranging reform affecting society and the armed forces, and thousands of young women and men in our society.

All Norwegian citizens are liable for compulsory military service from the year they turn 19 years of age, until the end of the year in which they reach the age of 44.

We have also noticed how Norway's decision to include both men and women in our military conscription system has attracted attention, and perhaps influences international debate over gender in military forces.

Universal conscription is important for two main reasons. Firstly, in all parts of society women and men have - and should have - equal rights, obligations and opportunities. Secondly, from a military perspective, the armed forces need to be able to recruit among the most capable candidates. Operational demands and high levels of specialization and technological sophistication dictate the need to recruit as widely as possible. We cannot afford to exclude half of the population in the recruitment process. In terms of human resources, the state sends a very clear message that competency is not down to gender, in this case the male gender.

The implementation of universal conscription comes with an overall ambition of recruiting more women into the Armed Forces, as conscripts and employees. It is widely acknowledged that a more even gender balance changes the work environment in a positive way. Greater diversity increases the "tool box" and expands options. It also paves the way for better popular support for, and knowledge of, the Armed Forces.

In the acknowledgement that Universal Conscription will actually bring about changes, five areas are in focus: Communications (information to parents, marketing, social media groups), Recruitment and selection processes (selection criteria, unit and career selection) Infrastructure (sanitary facilities, billeting), Personal gear (uniforms, flak jackets and other combat gear), and Leadership and organizational culture (leadership communication and engagement, code of conduct, awareness training and values).

Today's conscription system is based on the current needs of the Armed Forces. Norway requires roughly 8,000 soldiers for conscription every year, out of the roughly 60,000 candidates any given year. Before Universal conscription took effect, the current rate of female conscript was around 18 per cent. The first conscripts under the new system started their service in August 2016. In August 2016 women made up 10,8 % of our military personnel and roughly 25 % of the conscripts entered service were females.

While Universal conscription are increasing the percentage of women soldiers, women soldiers are not a new phenomenon. Conscription service was opened up to women on a voluntary basis in 1976. Only after 2000 did the number of women begin to increase. We sometimes get the question of whether women soldiers measure up. **Let me be very clear that women do not serve in order to demonstrate our gender equality.** Competition among conscript candidates is tough, and selection processes are solid, based on a combination of relevant criteria. The female soldiers serve because they have the right training, skills and motivation. We would never allow inferior soldiers to serve, the risks to the individual, unit or equipment would simply be too high.

Thank you for your attention