



The Commissioner
for Public Appointments
Northern Ireland

"Guardian of the Public Appointment Process"

Presentation by Commissioner John Keanie to the Northern
Ireland Assembly All Party Working Group on UNSCR 1325.

6th December 2013

Speaking Notes on CPA NI topic, 'Women in decision-making'.

Parliament Buildings, Friday 6th December 2013

- [1] I am pleased to have been asked to contribute to this enquiry. I have a real and active interest in your work.
- [2] First, some facts:
- There are currently over 1400 public appointments.
 - 464 of these are held by women.
 - That is 33%.
 - The figure was 32% in 2006 and 35% in 1998, the years of the St Andrews and Belfast Agreements.
- [3] This enquiry is asking, "How are the voices and opinions of women being included in decision-making". In terms of public appointments, the answer to that question is, "Not very well".

That is, there has been no improvement in the statistics since 1998.

- [4] Now to address briefly each of the aims of the Enquiry.
- The first one I have already addressed. Progress since the Good Friday Agreement and St Andrews Agreement has been nil, in percentage terms, on getting more women into public appointments.
 - Secondly - on the extent to which women have been represented in key social and economic institutions - it varies, from some boards with

very few women indeed, with an average, as I said, of 33%. 19% of public boards currently have a woman Chair.

- Thirdly - on the extent of women's opportunity to contribute - the statistics tell part of the story. Women themselves tell the rest. Many women, as individuals and in representative groups, tell me they feel excluded by the nature of the appointment process, and sometimes by the nature of how boards operate. So, unless the process is changed, and given the lack of progress for the past 15 years, it is most unlikely that a greater percentage of women will be appointed, or even apply for positions.
- Fourthly – the Enquiry asks, ‘what key actions have been taken by Government’, the answer has to be, "none that have been effective".
- The fifth aim of the enquiry is to receive recommendations on what measures can be taken by Government to ensure:
 - that 1325 is recognised as an important tool to ensure women's inclusion and
 - that appropriate actions are put in place to achieve this.

On the first point, i.e. recognition of 1325, the similarity is striking, between many features of 1325 and what the Government needs to do in the field of public appointments.

Here are some examples of what government needs to do. They are pretty much direct lifts from 1325:

- Urging our leaders to declare the importance of women at all decision-making levels.

- Implementing a strategic action plan to achieve this.
- Urging the appointment of more women and calling on all organisations and individuals to provide candidates.
- Looking at ways to expand the role and contribution of women on boards.
- Ensuring that a gender perspective is included in the setting-up and the work of all boards.
- Providing training to women - to compete for positions on boards and to fulfil their roles when appointed.
- Ensuring that the regulation mechanisms, including my own work as Commissioner, take account of gender considerations in the recruitment of board members.
- Reporting regularly on gender mainstreaming progress, and on parity, for women, against targets, and
- Taking a top level decision for government to remain "actively seized of the matter".

I would contend that these similarities highlight the need to recognise 1325 as an important tool.

On the second point, and to draw to a conclusion, regarding actions that should be taken:

- It is clear that the Executive and the Departments need to step up their efforts on this matter.
- To assist their thinking on it, I have, over the past year, initiated and led a "diversity initiative".
- I have just drafted my report, for discussion with the Head of the Civil Service and his Permanent Secretaries Group in January followed by dissemination to the politicians and publication in February.

- That report will recommend actions designed to move beyond ad-hoc, uncoordinated approaches by individual Departments, towards a position in which specific government policy on public board diversity is developed, with a framework for action by the Executive and the Departments which is monitored against targets and reported on annually.
- The policy and plans must make it clear to Departments, to potential applicants and to the public generally, that the intention is to change the culture of the public appointment process with the aim of improving diversity and eradicating under-representation on boards.
- Many recommendations for specific actions are included in the report, drawing on input by my Diversity Working Group, together with input from outside organisations, from the growing body of international research on the great added value of women on boards and from the policies and action programmes being implemented by the governments of other countries.

I look forward to the acceptance of the report by government, to a step-change in attitude and action on women on public boards, and to playing my part in helping government and its Departments move towards a successful resolution

John Keanie
Commissioner