



Norwegian Constitution Day



The Daily Star

Special Supplement

May 17, 2015

Women's Rights and Gender Equality

In 1913 Norway became the first sovereign country in the world to give women the right to vote. Dedicated women and men had been fighting tirelessly for many years to bring women into the public realm, overcoming traditional ideas about women's rights and place in society. Norway was the first sovereign state in the world to introduce universal suffrage for both men and women. Once women had the right to vote, the formal foundation was in place for them to participate in democratic bodies, on an equal footing with men. A struggle that had been ongoing since the French Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment, had finally been won.

Since then Norway has had a strong record for promoting gender equality, both in professional life and in politics, and is now one of the most gender equal countries in the world. Female participation in politics has remained strong for a long time. The first woman elected to Parliament was in 1921, and the current parliament has 40% women representatives. Gro Harlem Brundtland became Norway's first female Prime Minister in 1981. When she formed her new government in 1986, she chose a cabinet with 44% women. Since then, no Norwegian cabinet has had less than 40% women, and the current government has 50% women. There is no formal quota for including women in political parties in Norway, but most parties still strive to keep a gender balance. Female participation in the



Norway has a national elective assembly for indigenous people; the Sami Parliament with 39 representatives from 7 election districts throughout Norway.

workforce is one of the highest in the world (above 70 %), and this is one of the main reasons for Norway's strong economy. In 2003 the Norwegian Parliament passed a law that requires all Norwegian companies to have a minimum of 40% women board members. This has become a success and a model for other countries to follow. Women are also outperforming men in education, and have a ratio of 33% with higher education compared to 27% for men.

However, there are still many challenges remaining before we can fully achieve equal rights between men and women in Norway. Violence and rape

against women is still a serious problem, and often not reported to the police. Equal pay for equal work is also an issue where there is still a long way to go.

Women's rights and gender equality is a priority for the Norwegian Government, both domestically and in foreign policy. Women's participation and women's rights are of paramount importance if we are to realise the vision for the world's future enshrined in the UN Millennium Declaration. All experience shows that development is dependent on women's resources and expertise being fully utilised.

Norwegian policy aimed at integrating women's rights and

gender equality into development cooperation has been ambitious for many years. Together with our development partners, we seek to promote greater recognition and realisation of women's rights because women's rights are human rights. This means helping to ensure that women have economic opportunities, are empowered to influence social development and, not least, have control over their own lives. Norway supports women's rights and opportunities to participate on equal terms in national and local government. We seek to foster women's legal, economic and social independence.

Bangladesh has made significant progress in terms of women's empowerment and women's situation in general, including through the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals. More and more women are also taking active part in the economy, which has significant impacts in terms of gender equality. In the garment industry, 80% of the workforce is women, contributing a lot to the Bangladeshi economy.

Employment gives women more economic independence and increases their social status in society.

In our development cooperation with Bangladesh, women's rights and gender equality is a priority area. The Embassy is working closely with our local partners Ain-O-Salish Kendra (ASK) and Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP).

In most countries, men dominate in the areas where women are discriminated. This means that we need to encourage men to give women an opportunity to participate fully in economic, political and social processes. Men should not be regarded as impediments and barriers to women's development. Men can play an important role in efforts to promote women's rights and should be mobilised as allies by showing that men also will benefit from a more egalitarian society. When rigid gender patterns become more flexible, men also gain greater freedom to make individual choices in their lives.



The UNESCO-listed Nærøfjord is among the narrowest in Norway.

Message from the Ambassador

Constitution Day is the most colourful and festive day of the year for Norwegians. Parades of children waving national flags are the main elements and the traditional hallmarks of the



H.E. Ms. Merete Lundemo
Norwegian Ambassador to Bangladesh

celebrations - at home and abroad, in all Norwegian communities.

We celebrate the birthday of our 1814 Constitution, the oldest in Europe that is still in use, and the second oldest in the world. This progressive, liberal document ensured rule of law, and guided and inspired our country's development over two centuries towards today's modern, multicultural and democratic society.

Bangladesh's 1972 constitution plays a similar role, and has also always been considered a progressive document. It enshrines equal rights for all citizens; it guarantees religious freedom; it makes secularism a pillar of the nation. The constitutions of both our countries, although so many years apart, reflect the ambition to create an inclusive society, and to guarantee universal rights to all our citizens. Above all, the constitutions establish rule of law, a shared value and a prerequisite for building a modern, democratic state.

In addition to a well-founded pride in our respective constitutions, Bangladesh and Norway share many objectives for further developing our bilateral relationship. A close and good relationship, and also among the oldest - as Norway was one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh's independence on 14 April 1972.

To encourage Bangladesh's growing economy and rapid social development, our bilateral relationship now focuses on private sector cooperation and investments, as well as on political dialogue. Investment and trade create jobs and income that is beneficial to both countries. Big Norwegian investments in Bangladesh's telecom sector contribute to development, and help bring Digital Bangladesh closer. I hope for more investments and more cooperation in more sectors in the time ahead.

Human rights have always been at the centre of the cooperation between Bangladesh and Norway. I am pleased that Norway, although no longer a classic development partner, cooperates with Bangladesh and Bangladeshi civil society on human and women's rights issues. Climate change and disaster preparedness is another vital area where our two countries cooperate, share views and positions, and carry out activities together.

Today, on our Constitution Day, it is my sincere wish that our two countries' strong and modern constitutions will continue to inspire development of democratic, open societies governed by the rule of law. On such a firm basis, I am confident that our cooperation will continue to grow.

My best greetings to all friends of Norway in Bangladesh.

Facts about Norway



Area : 385,155 square kilometres
Capital city : Oslo
Population : 5,156,451 inhabitants (as of 1 October 2014)
Location : North Western Europe,
Borders : *Sweden, Finland, Russia*
History of Independence:
872 Unified under the Viking king Harald Hårfagre after the battle at Hafrsfjord
1397-1814 Union with Denmark (and Sweden 1397-1523)
1814 Norway signed its own constitution on 17th May
1814-1905 Union with Sweden
1905 Declared independence



Norway has one of the longest coastlines in the world, and fishing and fish farming is one the biggest export industries.



The Norwegian Royal family celebrates the national day and waves at the children's parade marching through Oslo.

Did you know this about Norway?

- Norwegians have always been explorers: From the Vikings who travelled wide and far a thousand years ago, to polar explorers Fridtjof Nansen and Roald Amundsen - the first man on the South Pole, and Thor Heyerdal who crossed the Pacific Ocean on a balsa raft.
- Norway is famous for its fjords, two of which, the Geirangerfjord and the Nærøfjord, feature on the UNESCO World Heritage list.
- North of the Arctic Circle the sun does not set in summer, meaning visitors to Northern Norway enjoy 24 hours of daylight this time of year.
- Norway has two official languages - Norwegian and Sami. Norwegian can be written in two different ways - bokmål and nynorsk. In addition people speak hundreds of different dialects.
- The weather in Norway is much milder than one would expect. Because of the Gulf Stream and warm air currents caused by the coriolis effect, temperatures along the coast of Norway are 5-8°C higher than at comparable latitudes elsewhere.

- The first UN General Secretary, Mr. Trygve Lie, was a Norwegian, and the United Nations have always been a pillar of Norway's foreign policy.
- People have been skiing for more than 4 000 years in Norway. In fact, this is where skiing first became a sport. Over the years, skiing moved from being a means of transportation, to pure fun. Most children start learning the skill when they are very young and Norwegians rush to the mountains and forests to ski every chance they get.



Norway's oldest wooden church 'Urnes Stave Church' listed in UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Congratulations

on the 201st Norwegian Constitution Day



telenor
group