



# Ålands fredsinstitut

## The Åland Islands Peace Institute

*NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations*

### **Statement**

The Åland Islands, an archipelago with autonomous status in Finland, are often called the “Islands of Peace”. This description is based on the fact that Åland has been demilitarized since 1856 and that a conflict between Sweden and Finland on the sovereignty over the island was solved by the League of Nations in 1921. However, just as in the rest of the world, on Åland and in the Nordic countries many women and girls – as well as boys and men - suffer from the gender norms, which lead to the marginalization of women and gender-based violence.

In order to eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women and girls we need to understand that violence as a strategy is strongly gendered and is intimately related to processes of masculinity. There remains an inherent understanding that masculinity is defined by aggressiveness, toughness and the use of violence – these are the norms that boys and men are expected to live up to. In society, there are mixed messages about using violence. At the same time as society condemns all forms of violence, men are expected to use violence in certain situations. Men are, in this way, not only exposed to but also expected to confirm to and to reproduce a culture of violence.

In order to eliminate violence against women and girls we need to problematize gender-based norms in general and masculinity in particular. Therefore a so-called “norm-critical approach” is useful in all work aimed at the prevention of violence. The Åland Island Peace Institute has created a network of partner organisations working on the civil society level to promote gender equality and to prevent gender-based violence including sexual violence and trafficking, on Åland, in Eastern Europe and in the South Caucasus. The network develops and promotes methods for empowerment based on a interactive approach, such as the girl and boy group method as well as fair sex workshops. The main focus in the method lies

on discussions and reflection on gender norms with the aim to question the gender power structures and norms which limit us as individuals, women and men, girls/boys.

Since men and women limit their acting spaces in accordance with different gender norms, the empowerment of boys and girls consequently differ according to gender. The empowerment of girls involves encouraging them to speak up, formulate their own opinions and increase their acting space. Boys, on the other hand, need to be empowered to resolve disputes with non-violent means, to listen to others and to talk about their feelings and emotions. Research on the girl and boy group method show several effects. After participating in a group, girls and boys have higher knowledge of gender equality, have become more critical to gendered expectations and norms and have increased their ability to express their own opinion. Furthermore, the results show clearly that boys are as interested as girls in participating in preventive work where they have the possibility to critically discuss gender norms and masculinity.

The work for gender equality and the prevention of violence against women has long focused on women. We urge all member states of the United Nations to acknowledge that the reproduction of masculinity needs to be addressed in all preventive work, which means men and boys need to be involved in preventive measures, in order to reconstruct such norms not to be characterized by violence but by mutual respect and equality.

*Submitted to the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women*

*The Åland Islands Peace Institute*

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