

## CHIEF OF POLICE WARNS AGAINST WOMEN POLICE OFFICERS- STATEMENT BY THE MEDITERRANEAN INSTITUTE OF GENDER STUDIES

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies [MIGS] demands a public apology from the Chief of the Cyprus Police Department as well as assurances that under no circumstances will measures be taken against the employment of women in the police force or in society in general. On the contrary, we expect additional measures to be implemented to increase the access of Cypriot women in the police force as well as for the better integration of policewomen already in the force.

On 29/10/2006 the Cyprus Chief of Police, Mr. Charalambos Koulendis, made statements to the Cypriot press criticizing the increasing number of women employed in the Cyprus Police Force and stating that this phenomenon is creating a crisis that urgently needs to be addressed with immediate measures. Mr. Koulendis stated that: "Women, by their nature, are biologically different to men and do not possess a high level of physical and muscular power and other particular physical traits such as speed, resilience, high level of courage for dealing with most police activities such as confronting cases of violence".

Further he claimed that: "with the increasing employment of women, the police force is in danger of becoming weak and defenseless" and suggested that immediate measures be taken such as the introduction of a quota system for the employment of women as well as an amendment making physical entry requirements for women the same as those for men. "Silencing an issue which concerns the very safety of the Republic of Cyprus and its citizens would be criminal and irresponsible", Mr. Koulendis said.

Despite the strong reactions to these comments by politicians, members of civil society and women's organizations, as well as the existence of a legal framework that protects society from statements such as these, the Chief of Police continues to actively promote his views.

The Institute absolutely disagrees with the unacceptable remarks of the Chief of Police. Women are essential in the police force as in any other occupation, irrespective of the biological differences between men and women.

The Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005) aims to contribute to the fight against gender inequality in economic, political, civil and social life and to the elimination of prejudices and stereotypes through the principle of gender mainstreaming: *"Gender mainstreaming involves not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but"*

*mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effects on the respective situation of men and women (gender perspective). This means systematically examining measures and policies and taking into account such possible effects when defining and implementing them.”<sup>1</sup>* The statements made by the Cyprus Chief of Police contradict the principle of gender mainstreaming and the right of women to equal access to employment in the police force, as in all spheres of public employment, must be protected at all costs.

Mr. Koulendis's recommendations for an amendment to the proportion of men and women in the Police Force, as well as for changes in the entry requirements for new recruits, violate the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW, to which Cyprus is a signatory, stresses the importance of *equality of opportunity* in terms of women's access on equal terms with men to the resources of a country. The Convention also emphasizes the need to ensure *equality of results*. Thus, the convention is not concerned so much with equal treatment but with equal access and equal benefits. Expecting women to access opportunities and perform according to the same rules and standards as men violates the Convention in that it results in the de facto discrimination against women because it does not recognise the significant biological as well as socially constructed differences between them.<sup>2</sup>

The Cyprus Police Law (2004) states that the Police Force may enforce its authority for the preservation of law and order, the maintenance of peace, and the prevention and investigation of crime, as well as for the arrest and prosecution of offenders<sup>3</sup>. The police force represents and carries the responsibility for the protection of all citizens, women and men.

The law states that "As far as qualifications for the hiring and promotion of police officers, candidates must be capable of exercising good judgment....and have good knowledge of social, cultural and community matters. Finally the procedures for hiring should be based on objective criteria and the choice of candidates should be made without discrimination.... this tactic should aim at the hiring of both men and

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equ\\_opp/gms\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equ_opp/gms_en.html)

<sup>2</sup> Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

<sup>3</sup> Cyprus Police Law 2004, Part 2, Article 4

women from different social levels, inclusive of minorities, so that the police staff reflects the society it serves"

Women, like men, have the right to choose to serve in the Police Force as long as they pass the written, oral and physical examinations that are required of them.

**With concern to the legal framework:**

The Cypriot State, which is based on democratic principles and values drawn from the Constitution and the European Union, is responsible for the elimination of all forms discrimination against women, not only through the drafting and passing of appropriate laws but also in their practical application and implementation for the realization of real equality.

The suggestions of the Chief of Police violate the principles of equality, democracy and contradict the values of the European Union.

Gender discrimination in the workplace is a general problem in Cyprus which boasts the highest gender pay gap in the European Union (26%) and the highest gender segregation in employment among member states. The Institute believes that the Chief's remarks are grounded in social prejudices leading to negative stereotypes that adversely affect women. MIGS observes that:

- The Police employ 5,118 persons, of whom 859 are women [16.77%]. As in other occupational sectors in Cyprus, women are underrepresented in the Police Force. Furthermore, women are most often found in the lower ranks while the majority of decision makers and the highest ranking officers are men.
- Mr. Koulendis observation that: "with the rising employment of women the Force is in danger of becoming weak" implies that the most important characteristic of the Police is physical strength. Recent reports of police brutality in Cyprus have shown that it is important and necessary to find alternatives to the use of violence in the Police Force and resorting to violence should always be the exception rather than the rule.
- Cyprus is fraught by crimes that affect women such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, honour-related violence, trafficking in women, and teenage substance abuse, all of which could best be handled by female police officers for obvious reasons relating to gender.
- Research, such as the one conducted by the Police Foundation (<http://www.policefoundation.org/docs/policewomen.html>), has demonstrated that gender is not a valid reason to exclude women from police patrol work. According to this study, both female and male patrol officers respond to similar of calls for

service and encounter the same number of dangerous, angry, upset, drunk, or violent citizens. Although both groups obtained similar results when handling angry or violent citizens, the study noted that women patrol officers tended to be more effective than their male counterparts in avoiding violence and defusing potentially violent situations. The research explains that women act less aggressively and believe less in aggression. In Cyprus, excessive use of violence has been employed on a number of occasions, mostly by male officers in the Police Force, often shaking public opinion and drawing criticism from human rights organizations such as Amnesty International. Thus, the most important goal for the Police in Cyprus is to take immediate measures to combat such phenomena with an emphasis of respect for human rights. This would greatly enhance the respect afforded the Police Force by Cypriot women and men.

- The prejudice expressed by the Chief of Police that "employing more women will weaken the force" perpetuates negative stereotypes of women and also enforces and promotes an image of a Police Force that uses and promotes violence.
- It is true that many women members of the Force express an unwillingness to work late hours, citing family duties. Unfortunately for all, women cite real situations since they are expected to care for their children and families on top of their work duties. It is also true that women are vulnerable to various forms of gender based violence such as harassment and assault. Rather than punishing women by placing restrictions on access to the Police Force, immediate measures should be taken to create an environment that is conducive to the human rights of women and all gender based restrictions to the realization of women's access to opportunity in all spheres of public life are removed.

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Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies [M.I.G.S]  
46 Makedonitissas Avenue,  
P.O.Box 24005, Nicosia 1703, Cyprus  
Tel: ++ 35722 351274 (ext.115) Fax: ++357 22 353682  
Email: [info@medinstgenderstudies.org](mailto:info@medinstgenderstudies.org)  
website: <http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org>

