

Opening speech – Gender Equality Event

EXPO2025 in Osaka

September 1, 2025

Excellencies, colleagues and dear friends,

It is truly a great honour to welcome you to the Nordic Pavilion here at Expo 2025 in Osaka, and to this special event dedicated to gender equality. The theme of our gathering today – Sustainable Growth through Gender Equality – could not be more timely or more relevant.

The World Expo is a celebration of innovation, exchange, and learning across cultures. For us in the Nordic countries, it is also an opportunity to share not only what we have achieved, but also the lessons we continue to learn.

Gender equality has become one of the cornerstones of our societies – not only as a matter of justice, but also as a foundation for sustainable growth. We know that inclusive societies are stronger, and that when we share power equally, everyone benefits. It builds stronger societies – and through that a stronger world.

We see this progress in our welfare systems, in parental leave, and in women's participation in politics and public life. But it did not happen overnight. And we are not at our goal yet. For instance, in the Faroe Islands one of our bigger problems is that we are in a lack of women. They are leaving the country much more than men – and do not return.

The Nordic path toward gender equality has been long and often difficult. More than a century ago, women secured the right to vote and to stand for election. In the decades that followed, we expanded childcare systems and introduced generous parental leave to make it possible for both mothers and fathers to combine work and family life.

Each step was hard-won, and even today, our work is far from done. The gender pay gap, under-representation in leadership, violence against women,

challenges around diversity, and the fight to safeguard women's bodily autonomy remain very real.

Yet these reforms have shaped the societies we know today – and shown that equality and sustainable growth reinforce each other.

At the same time, we are facing wider global challenges. In recent years, we have seen growing resistance – even regression – against gender equality, women's and girls' rights, and the rights of LGBTI persons. We have to stay strong together and face these challenges.

This is why the Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality and LGBTI adopted a common **Nordic Roadmap** – with the ambition of *pushing back the push-back* and continuing to move forward to a more equal world.

Our goal is clear: to safeguard universal human rights, to ensure that no one is left behind, and to stand firm against discrimination. We must push forward.

We cannot ignore the global picture. Around the world, we see setbacks – from restrictions on reproductive rights, to laws that silence women activists, to growing intolerance toward LGBTI communities. These trends remind us that progress is fragile. What takes decades to build can be undone in only a few years – or less!

That is why international cooperation is so vital. And that is why linking equality to sustainable growth – making it a driver of stronger, more resilient societies – is so powerful. If women and girls are left behind the future society will not be sustainable.

Japan brings to this conversation its own remarkable strengths – world-class education, technological innovation, and a strong sense of community. These are invaluable foundations as we look for new ways to advance equality together.

I also want to highlight Japan's Nordic Diplomacy Initiative, announced last year. The initiative rests on four pillars – one of them being gender equality.

Within this, Japan has placed special emphasis on the Women, Peace and Security agenda as a key element of its foreign policy. This is a powerful signal of

Japan's commitment to advancing equality both at home and abroad, and it creates a strong foundation for deepening our cooperation.

For us in the Nordic region, it is inspiring to see Japan highlight gender equality as one of the central pillars of our partnership. The Nordic experience may offer ideas, perhaps even a roadmap, but it is not a blueprint.

What worked for us may not work in the same way elsewhere. That is why we see this as a true partnership – an opportunity to share both successes and struggles, to learn from each other's strengths, and to shape solutions rooted in our own traditions yet inspired by one another.

Together, we can develop approaches that neither of us could achieve alone – and in doing so, we can show that gender equality is not only fair, but also a pathway to sustainable growth.

If we combine the Nordic commitment to equality with Japan's strength in innovation, we can create a powerful alliance – one that benefits our own societies but also serves as inspiration globally.

Dear friends, equality is not a gift handed down to us. It is built, day by day, through choices, policies, and the courage of individuals and civil movements.

So let us not walk ahead or behind one another, but side by side – pushing forward on a shared roadmap towards a future where equality is not only a vision, but a reality. A reality lived by generations to come – and a reality for us living now – that will be a key to a strong sustainable future.

Thank you.