

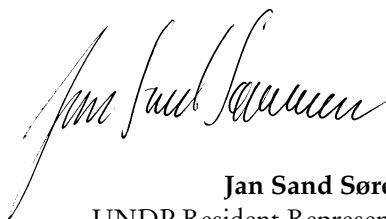
Foreword

When Latvia's Constitution was renewed following the restoration of independence in 1991, one of the basic principles enshrined therein was the right of every individual to be protected from discrimination on the basis of his or her sex. Latvia has signed the relevant international conventions which guarantee equal rights for men and women, and this principle is also embodied in Latvian legislation.

It therefore seems that Latvia has come a long way towards ensuring gender equality for its inhabitants in the relatively short time that has elapsed since the restoration of independence. However, this formal equality guaranteed by signatures and promises is only the foundation — the base — upon which true equality in everyday relations and interactions must be built. It is one thing to put pen to paper and adopt a law; it is quite another whether this law is applied throughout society and in all aspects of life — in the labour market, in schools and education, and in the home. While many people think gender equality is only a question of “women's equality”, it is in fact as much about men's, or rather of equal opportunities for all and of increasing the well-being of each individual in society, regardless of sex.

While formal equality strives to guarantee justice and fairness, gender equality is just as much about guaranteeing the welfare, stability and sustainability of a nation. By looking at the concepts of “gender” and “human development” as closely linked, the report therefore hopes to promote an understanding of the added value of gender equality for all of society, and of the links between gender inequalities and other problems. These problems include opportunities within the labour market, division of labour within the home, deteriorating health indicators, and rising incidence of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation.

Sustainable solutions demand the development of appropriate mechanisms that will enable the Government, in cooperation with civil society, to recognize, monitor and react to gender inequalities and related problems. The establishment of a Gender Focal Point in the Ministry of Welfare at the beginning of this year is a commendable first step in this direction. However, longer term change will demand a strengthened dialogue about gender issues at all levels of society, and a shift in the way these issues are approached and understood. I hope that the report **Gender and Human Development in Latvia** will provide as strong contribution to this important dialogue.



Jan Sand Sørensen
UNDP Resident Representative
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