

## **PRESS RELEASE:**

### **NCPE's 8th Annual Conference The need of more women in decision-making positions**

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality carried out its 8th Annual Conference during which another group of organisations/entities were awarded the Equality Mark. This Annual Conference highlighted the main developments that were achieved throughout 2011 as well as the way forward in relation to achieving *de facto* equality in society at large.

In his opening address, Minister for Justice, Dialogue and the Family, Hon. Chris Said, said that throughout the past eight years NCPE managed to raise awareness about equality of rights and of opportunities and it has also worked assiduously towards moulding and shaping Maltese culture in favour of more rights and more opportunities for everyone.

Minister Said highlighted the various developments that took place in recent years: female participation in the labour market increased from 33.5% in 2004 to 41.1% in 2011. Between 2007 and 2012, gainfully occupied women increased by 8,294. Women in tertiary education have increased by leaps and bounds so much so that they represent 60 per cent of the student population at the University of Malta.

Minister Said expressed government's commitment to offer further flexible work arrangements and family-friendly measures for more workers. As from 1 January of this year, maternity leave has been extended to 16 weeks. In less than eight months time, it will increase by another two weeks to eighteen. In the Budget for 2012, Government announced a new tax computation, named the 'Parent Computation', which is intended to support parents in employment whose children are not gainfully employed up to 18 years of age. Parents opting for this computation are paying up to €840 less income tax annually. Government is also committed to invest in more fiscal incentives such as the tax holiday afforded to mothers who return to employment. As a result of this scheme, over 8,600 women returned to the labour market and saved around 10 million euro in income tax payments.

Minister Chris Said stated that in view of the fact that diversity is increasingly growing in our country, government acknowledges the need for empowerment of persons who are at risk of being discriminated against. It is for this reason that government has drafted and presented amendments to the Equality for Men and Women Act, which effectively will be widening the remit of the National Commission for the Promotion Equality. Through these amendments, NCPE will now be also entrusted with safeguarding and promoting equal treatment on the grounds of age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and religious belief.

NCPE's Executive Director, Dr Romina Bartolo, gave an extensive overview of the initiatives and measures carried out by NCPE in 2011. During 2011, NCPE continued to receive requests for information on various issues related to equality, and complaints were lodged on a regular basis. Some of these complaints included alleged discriminatory application forms for jobs; allegations of sexual harassment at the place of work; and allegations of dismissal from work due to being pregnant. As to racial discrimination, NCPE

during 2011 received complains that involved allegations of race discrimination in the supply of/and access to housing and in access to night clubs.

Dr Romina Bartolo highlighted also the work carried out by NCPE through EU co-funded projects, namely *ESF 3.47 - 'Unlocking the Female Potential'*, *VS/2010/9569 Think Equal* and *VS/2010/0819 Gender Mainstreaming – in Practice*. As part of '*Unlocking the Female Potential*', another award ceremony was organised during this Annual Conference for organisations certified with the Equality Mark. Another four organisations – *Grand Hotel Excelsior*, *Nectar Group of Companies*; *PricewaterhouseCoopers* and *Sign Services (Malta)* - have been certified as true equal opportunities employers in relation to gender and hence will be using the Equality Mark logo on their publications and documentation. By the end of 2011 there were 32 organisations certified which in total employ more than 13,000 employees.

Following the Equality Mark Certification, a presentation and discussion on women in decision-making positions was carried out by Ms Serap Altinisik from the European Women's Lobby. Ms Altinisik set the scene in policy decision-making where less than 20% of the world's parliamentary seats are occupied by women and the proportion of women ministers averaging 16%. She mentioned that some 50 countries have adopted legislation on candidate quotas, however only six EU member states adopted legislation on such quotas.

Even if women now have some important posts, reiterated Ms Altinisik, women are still underrepresented in political and economic decision-making in all European countries. Ms Altinisik laid down the conditions for improving the situation, mentioning the commitment of political parties which is crucial for equal representation of women and men. Ms Altinisik said that voluntary quotas by political parties can work, but without legal obligation they may be neglected. The equal representation of women and men in decision-making, emphasised Ms Altinisik, is a question that has an impact on all of us – it is a question of democracy in all organisations and institutions.

For more information about the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) please contact us on [equality@gov.mt](mailto:equality@gov.mt) or on 2590 3850.

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