

GENDER-NEUTRAL COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE IN NORWAY

Thank you, Mr Chairman,

This month, 100 years after women in Norway were granted the right to vote, the Parliament decided to introduce **gender-neutral compulsory military service** in Norway. This is a historic day in terms of full equal rights and obligations for all citizens in our country. Norway is thus the only country in Europe to practice general compulsory military service, for both men and women.

Amongst others two reasons make this decision appropriate in today's Norway;
First, Male-only conscription is not consistent with the rest of our society. All citizens shall have the same rights and obligations, regardless of gender.
Second, the Armed Forces need to be able to recruit from the best. We need diversity throughout the defence sector. Norway cannot afford to exclude half of the population in this recruitment process.

Thus, the introduction of gender-neutral compulsory military service is a matter of principle, it strengthens the operational capability of our Armed Forces – we believe that we will do better in military operations when we can recruit from a diverse group of people, with different skills, perspectives and gender.

Mr Chairman,

The introduction of this compulsory military service for all does not mean that all Norwegian women will have to serve as conscripts. Norway needs about 8,000 to 10,000 soldiers for conscription every year, women and men in total, out of the 60,000 that are available.

We do not introduce general compulsory military service because we need more soldiers, but because we need the best ones.

The Norwegian policy is of course in line with UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and we find that having a gender-perspective in military operations improves our overall ability to meet the missions' requirements. In Afghanistan we find that large segments of the female population are only allowed to speak to other women. This dialogue between the women is very important for peace, stabilization and nation-building. It provides much better situational awareness, which improves security and helps improve the decision making processes. The gender perspective consequently, is directly linked to operational requirements.

Norway, FSC 26 June 2013

Mr Chairman,

Norway's ambition is to have 20 per cent women serving in uniform, currently we have only 9 per cent.

Before the implementation of the general compulsory military service, a law has to be passed in parliament. A draft proposal prepared by the Norwegian government will be ready for discussion later this year. In the spring of 2014 the law will be presented to the Parliament and we expect the gender-neutral conscription to be implemented by 2015.

Thank you.

Background:

Whitepaper – “Competency for a New Era” (Meld. St. 14)

The Norwegian defence sector has entered its third phase of a relatively comprehensive transformation to adapt to current and future requirements. The first phase focused on the structure of the Armed Forces, the second on a functional organization, and the third deals with personnel – individual and collective professional competence.

The two major questions we have to ask ourselves are these: what kind of competence does our armed forces need in a ten to twenty year perspective that will enable us to meet a wide spectrum of increasingly complex operational tasks; and how do we go about recruiting and keeping the best and the brightest in what will be an increasingly competitive market?

To deal with this we have embarked on a competence reform, of which one aspect is White Paper No. 14, “Competence for a new era”.

Compulsory military service

Compulsory military service remains fundamentally important for the Norway. Defence is an integral part of the Norwegian society and compulsory military service and national service contribute towards the legitimacy of the Armed Forces and their foundations as part of society. The organization of compulsory military service and national service requires development so that it is fully adapted to the needs of the Armed Forces, society and the individual conscript.

General compulsory military service implies that all men who are approved as serviceable have to take national service and be available to the nation from the age of 19 to 44. Conscripts therefore carry out an obligation even though they are not drafted to complete national service.

The new scheme and obligatory examination of women liable for military service was introduced in 2010. In 2011, 5,286 women completed part 2 of the examination. 872 women attended for national service in 2011, i.e. a ratio of 7.7 per cent. Of these, 706 women completed national service in 2011, i.e. 8.3 per cent of the total. In 2012, 6,769 women completed part 2 of the examination. Of this number, 1,076 women attended for national service in 2012, i.e. a ratio of 10 per cent. The Armed Forces expects to see a slight increase in these figures in the years to come. The figure for completion of national service has to be compared with the number called up in the previous year. For 2012 therefore, the figure for completion will not be available until the annual report for 2013 is published.