

Opening remarks delivered by Ambassador Eberhard Pohl

Gender Conference

Combating violence against women in the OSCE region – bringing security home

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The persistence of violence against women is of deep concern to us. Violence against women and girls is one of the most serious and widely-spread human rights violations and heinous crimes, with sexual violence being an even more scandalous specificity. It violates one of the most valuable and important human rights: the dignity of a human being.

The physical and psychological consequences of these crimes for the victims are long-lasting and often devastating. Violence creates fear and disconnects victims from society.

Therefore, the protection of women and girls needs our special attention. To comply with human rights is what the participating States promised to guarantee for *all* their inhabitants equally. However, there can be no genuine equality between women and men if women experience gender-based violence on a large-scale, and if state agencies, institutions and societies are too passive on the matter. We have the obligation to fully address the issue in all its forms and to take measures to prevent violence against women, to protect victims and to prosecute the perpetrators.

I am pleased to inform you on that matter that the German Parliament just adopted a law to reform sexual violence crimes. It thereby integrates concepts

from the Istanbul Convention against Violence against Women from 2011 into German law.

The reform introduces the “No means No”-principle to German criminal law statutes and intends to minimize remaining gaps in this regard. It strengthens the position of victims of sexual violence and creates a wider range of pursuable actions. With this reform, Germany continues to take a strong stand against sexual violence and enhances the protection of victims in sexual violence situations furthermore.

Finding ways how policy makers and implementers can take concrete steps to improve the situation remains a challenge. To effectively combat the issue of violence, it is important that we – the participating states - work hand in hand with all stakeholders.

The “Draft Addendum to the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality of 2004” as it has been developed last year encompasses several core areas. The German Chairmanship has decided to concentrate on two areas, namely violence against women and women’s participation in conflict prevention, settlement and rehabilitation. On the latter, we have just had an inspiring Chairmanship Event in the margins of the ASRC. We are currently planning a conference on the various aspects with respect to Women, Peace and Security, to take place in Berlin on November 18.

With today’s conference we want to offer a platform to exchange information, experiences and good practices among participating States on combating violence against women. We also want to look into two aspects that have been highlighted by many participating States: Sexual violence which often increases during armed conflicts and is sometimes used as a tactic of war and terror. And, on the other hand, the role of men and boys in finding durable solutions

against violence. Furthermore, we want to identify areas and ways for future work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Gender Section for organizing this conference within very short notice. This has been a tremendous effort. I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to the participating States that contributed with sending dedicated speakers, such as Belarus, Slovakia and Kazakhstan. For co-sponsoring the conference, I'd like to extend a special thanks to Finland and the Netherlands.

I am also particularly pleased to see ODIHR and many OSCE field missions represented in the audience who provide important work at the field level.

I wish you a successful and fruitful conference.