

Session 14

UK National Statement on Gender Equality: OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), Warsaw, 28th September – for Electronic distribution

We fully align with the statement made by Finland on behalf of the EU and its Member States and would like to add a few points in my national capacity.

The UK greatly values the work of the OSCE in the field of human rights, and tackling gender inequality, including through supporting implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The UK is strongly committed to achieving progress in gender equality and advancing the rights of women, both domestically and internationally, not least because the effective and equal participation of women in public and economic life is an essential element of good governance and effective democracy.

For the UK, tackling violence against women and girls remains a top priority and we welcome that the OSCE has clear commitments in this area. Violence against women and girls is rooted in gender inequality, power imbalances, and social norms that maintain gender inequality between women and men, girls and boys.

We are committed to holding perpetrators of violence against women and girls to account and are making progress in this area: in 2014-15 we reached the highest level ever of prosecutions and convictions for domestic abuse, rape & sexual offences since we started recording this data. We have also brought about legislative change. The UK law on domestic abuse is now even stronger with the introduction in December last year of a new domestic abuse offence to capture coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate and familial relationships.

But attitudinal change is also important. The storyline about domestic violence and coercive control on the BBC Radio 4 show 'The Archers', which we presented in the margins of the OSCE Human Dimension Committee meeting on gender equality in April, increased public awareness in the UK of domestic abuse within familial relationships. Few recent OSCE side events have had such resonance with partners

and indeed within our own diplomatic network across the OSCE region. Since then, the BBC's broadcast dramatisation of the court case has also raised awareness of the importance of the justice system responding with understanding to the needs of women and girls.

Sexual and gender based violence is a truly global challenge. Since 2012 the UK's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative has galvanised the international community to take action to help eradicate the scourge of sexual violence in conflict. We want to do more to support survivors and hold perpetrators of sexual violence accountable. But we also want to do more to challenge negative attitudes and misunderstandings that cause further suffering to survivors and children born as a result of rape. Tackling this stigma is surely a priority we can and must share. We were therefore pleased to see broad support for the PSVI agenda by OSCE participating States, during the visit to the OSCE in July of the Foreign Office Minister for Human Rights and the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Baroness Anelay. We are looking forward to cooperating further on this in the OSCE.

Finally, the UK welcomes the OSCE's focus on supporting the implementation of National Action Plans on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent related resolutions. 1325 is the cornerstone of global efforts to promote gender equality, advance women's rights and participation, and steer us all in our efforts. We would fully support enhancement of the OSCE framework in this regard, including an OSCE wide action plan on UNSCR 1325. But as, if not more important, is ensuring that the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and other related commitments are fully implemented, both by the OSCE and all its participating States, and that progress is fully evaluated.