



STATEMENT ON  
The International Day of the Girl

Delivered by Ambassador Anne-Kirsti Karlsen on behalf of the OSCE Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict at the Forum for Security Cooperation  
Vienna, 11 October 2023

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Madam Chair,

On behalf of Albania, Belgium, Italy, Norway and Poland, forming the OSCE Group of Friends on Children in Armed Conflict, I wish to take this opportunity to commemorate the International Day of the Girl. For more than a decade, this day has served to recognise the rights of girls, and the importance of their empowerment. It is a day devoted to highlighting the inequalities facing girls around the world, while also taking stock of the progress that has been made.

In marking the International Day of the Girl, we wish to shed light on the challenges facing girls affected by armed conflict, while also acknowledging the need to amplify their voices. Over twenty years ago, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted, calling attention to the gendered impact of armed conflict. The resolution established that the lens through which women and girls experience conflict differs from that of men and boys.

Just as women and men's experiences of conflict are different, so are those of girls and boys. Girls are, for instance, at greater risk than boys of becoming victims of sexual violence, exploitation, and gender-based violence. Girls are, moreover, often overlooked in reintegration programs. In conflict-affected countries around the world, girls are more likely to be kept out of school, preventing them from reaching their full potential.

It is indisputable that girls are agents of change. Yet, the voices of both women and girls are often ignored or underrepresented in peacebuilding processes, despite evidence showing their full, equal, and meaningful participation plays an indispensable role in building lasting peace. We must ensure that today's girls are able to become tomorrow's capable and empowered women. Strengthening their voices is the only path to durable peace.

Madam Chair,

The reality remains that girls suffer significantly during times of war. With the numerous conflicts taking place around the world today, we are reminded of the

children who are innocently, and often disproportionately, affected by war. Our thoughts are with the children of Nagorno Karabakh, Israel and Palestine, as well as all other children affected by armed conflict.

Not least, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is on the top of our agenda and will remain so for as long as it lasts. This war has demonstrated the devastating impact of armed conflict on girls and boys. In a report released by the UN Secretary General this year, the UN verified 2,334 violations against children, including detention and torture, sexual violence, abduction, as well as the killing of children by the Russian Armed Forces. The report further verified a concerning number of attacks on schools and hospitals.

Such violations have undoubtedly left a long-lasting psychological imprint. Addressing the mental health impacts of armed conflict on children is crucial both in humanitarian response, as well as in post-war reconstruction efforts. Recognizing the long-term mental health impacts of conflict-related sexual violence — which disproportionately impacts girls — is, moreover, pivotal. We are, in this regard, pleased that the link between mental health and armed conflict is receiving increased attention in this forum.

Madam Chair,

This past year, we have witnessed the bravery of girls around the world in their fight for equality. In Iran, over 20,000 women and girls are reported to have been detained following mass protests calling for the freedom of women and girls over their own bodies. And in Afghanistan, girls are advocating for their right to education, despite the serious risks this entails.

Last Friday, the Norwegian Nobel Committee announced that this year's Nobel Peace Prize will be awarded to Narges Mohammadi for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran, and for their right to live full and dignified lives. Awarding the prize to Mohammadi reminds us of the crucial role of women and girls in advancing peace, and the inequality and the mistreatment they continue to face both within and outside the OSCE region. We stand in solidarity with the girls of Iran, [the girls] of Afghanistan, and with all girls across the world who are fighting to break cycles of discrimination and violence.

Madam Chair, dear colleagues,

In closing, let me underline that it is our *duty* to safeguard the rights of girls: it is our duty to ensure that they reach their full potential, that their voices are heard, and that they can do so free from fear of persecution, exploitation, or harm. Our common future depends upon it.

Thank you.