

**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Secretariat**

**Enhancing the role of women mediators in the OSCE region
Vienna, October 2012**

UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security calls for the involvement of women in all stages of peace processes, including mediation efforts. In 2011 the UN stressed the importance of including women in mediation in UN General Assembly Resolution 65/283 as an important cornerstone to achieve sustainable solutions in conflict situations. Women raise topics beyond “women’s issues” to address fundamental questions of security and justice. In many cultures, women are perceived as being less threatening, and due to this they are well placed to facilitate difficult discussions among negotiating sides. Both male and female mediators suggest that the presence of a woman can seem less threatening to conflict parties, and thus promotes a less aggressive atmosphere.

Additionally, women can bring a different perspective to formal peace negotiations that can not be ignored when trying to achieve sustainable peace. In peace negotiations, which often concentrate on territory, sovereignty and power, women not only provide information on how the conflict affects women and children, but also emphasize other areas that are necessary for a sustainable peace, such as livelihoods, education, health and community coherence. An additional benefit of including women in the peace process is that women involved in mediation efforts are often closely linked to civil society, which means that they can deliver broad support to a peace process.

Yet, there has been little appreciable increase in the strikingly low numbers of women in these roles. The UN, for example, has never appointed a woman as chief or lead mediator in peace talks it has sponsored. In 2010 UNIFEM found in a limited but reasonably representative sample of 24 major peace processes since 1992, only 2.5 per cent of signatories, 3.2 per cent of mediators and 7.6 per cent of negotiators are women.¹ In 2010 only 16 percent of peace agreements specifically address women’s rights and needs.² Seeing that more than 50% of peace agreements fail within the first five years of signature it is evident that something needs to be changed in formal peace negotiations.³

This is naturally also true for the OSCE region where women are rarely included in high level mediation processes, but are more likely to play a key role on a grassroots level in keeping channels of communication open across conflict divides, as well as arranging mediation on a local level. Examples of women functioning as mediators on a grassroots level in the OSCE region could be seen in the Kyrgyz Republic, where women mediators play an important role

¹ *Women’s participation in peace negotiations: Connections between presence and influence*, Unifem, 2010

² <http://www.unifem.org.au/AnnouncementRetrieve.aspx?ID=40960>

³ http://www.internationalalert.org/pdf/Donor_Aid_Strategies_in_Post_Peace_settlement_environments.pdf p6

in bridging ethnic divides in the aftermath of the tensions of 2010. These efforts are supported by the Centre in Bishkek. In the 1990s women were able to stay in touch across ethnic divides throughout the conflicts of former Yugoslavia. Although these efforts were commendable, the women mediators were forgotten in formal peace processes that ensued.

The OSCE is tasked through MC Decision 14/05 and MC Decision 3/11 to incorporate women in all its work concerning conflict prevention, conflict solution, rehabilitation and restructuring. With a roundtable discussing the role of female mediators the OSCE Gender Section intends to raise a discussion of how to advance women's inclusion in mediation and ensuring gender sensitive peace processes and agreements.

The aim of the roundtable

The roundtable will look how women's experience of peace building in conflict situations can be incorporated in the formal negotiations. The roundtable will gather 20 female mediators to look at contributions that have been made so far by women to achieve sustainable peace and what lesson learnt can be drawn from that. Additionally, the roundtable will try and identify possible entry points for women to participate in formal peace negotiations. A guide on best practices in the OSCE region will be published following the event.

The conference will address:

1. What examples are there of female mediators in formal and informal peace processes? Why are there so few female mediators even though research has shown that female mediators are beneficial in many formal peace negotiations? How does one create structures to reach out to women engaged in local peace processes and to include them in formal processes?
2. Good practices and challenges women face as mediators. How do women get involved in mediation on a grassroots level? What tools and practices do they use?
3. What entry points are there for female mediators in formal peace processes? What should change in the strategies of international organizations and state stakeholders to include female mediators?