

Country Visit: Armenia
Report of the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office
on Gender Issues June Zeitlin

September 29 - October 2, 2013

Introduction

The goal of my visit to Armenia was to examine and raise issues related to gender equality. More specifically, during my visit I focused on women's political participation, non-discrimination, violence against women, and women, peace and security. My trip was framed by the OSCE's commitments on gender equality. These include promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming within the organization, and encouraging states to implement OSCE gender equality commitments in six priority areas (protection against discrimination, prevention of violence against women, promotion of women's participation in the political and public sphere, promotion of women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution, enhancement of equal opportunities for women in the economic sphere, and the creation of national mechanisms to promote the advancement of women).¹

I wish to thank the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their warm welcome to Armenia and for arranging the extensive and varied program. I would also like to acknowledge the OSCE Mission in Yerevan for providing support and assistance throughout the visit, which included arranging meetings with women's non-governmental organizations and with other multilateral agencies operating in Yerevan. Additionally, I would like to give a special note of thanks to all of the individuals who took the time to meet with me during my time in Armenia.

This report reflects my views as the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender Issues based on discussions that took place with government officials, members of Parliament, representatives of NGOs and civil society organizations, and other international agencies (see attached list of meetings). It concludes with my recommendations.

Legal and Institutional Context

In preparation for the visit, I reviewed the following: the most recent report from Armenia to the CEDAW committee², the most recent set of Concluding Observations from the CEDAW Committee to Armenia³, the "Women Connect Across Conflicts: Building Accountability for Implementation of UNSCRs 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889: Mapping Study of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan" with regards to Armenia's implementation of Security

¹ See generally "Gender Equality," at <http://www.osce.org/gender/41497>.

² U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/ARM/4 (December 28 2007), at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/203/08/PDF/N0820308.pdf?OpenElement>.

³ U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1 (February 2, 2009), at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/229/31/PDF/N0922931.pdf?OpenElement>.

Council Resolution 1325⁴, and the “Nationwide Survey on Domestic Violence in Armenia.”⁵ These documents provided a comprehensive overview of the legislative, social and cultural aspects of gender equality in Armenia. In addition, I received copies of the government’s Strategic Action Plan on Gender Policy and the Strategic Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, all citizens are equal and discrimination on the basis of sex is prohibited.⁶ The Strategic Action Plans on Gender Policy and Combating Gender Based Violence were adopted by the government in order to implement the country’s international and national commitments to advance gender equality. The Strategic Action Plan on Gender Policy focuses on general actions to improve equality between men and women and to reduce gender stereotypes, including supporting gender equality in mass media and increasing women’s health prevention programs. The Strategic Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence focuses on actions to prevent domestic violence, which includes the organization of capacity building workshops for professionals tasked with prevention and support services and the development of public awareness campaigns about the problem of domestic violence. In conversations with government officials, discussion centered on the purpose of these documents; namely whether they embody commitments to take specific actions in a set timeframe, as is customarily found in an Action Plan, or whether they are statements of principles to guide government action. Much effort went into the development of these plans, but, to date, there are limited measureable results or specific outcomes that can be identified.

One important step was the passage of the law “Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women” by the National Parliament in May 2013. This was a significant step forward in placing equal rights for women unequivocally in the law. However, to the surprise of many, this legislation sparked fierce opposition, including personal attacks on its supporters, and triggered a campaign based on lies and misrepresentation about the meaning of gender equality and the impact of the law on Armenian family life. During my visit, there was great concern that a more vigorous response to these attacks was needed by government authorities and other key stakeholders. It seemed important that the country’s leadership speak out more strongly to acknowledge emphatically the importance of tolerance and non-discrimination as a social norm. Subsequently, on 22 November, the Women’s Council under the Prime Minister issued a statement in support of gender equality and the new law. This statement was praised by the UN House representatives of international organizations present in Armenia. At the request of the government, I have attached these statements to the report.

Armenia has been working on a domestic violence law for several years. This year a draft domestic violence law was submitted to the government by a task force of government and non-governmental representatives. It was returned by the government for further

⁴ “Women Connect Across Cultures: Building Accountability for Implementation of UNSCRs 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889: Mapping Study of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan,” at www.unwomen-eeca.org/module/project/img/511.pdf.

⁵ “Nationwide Survey on Domestic Violence against Women in Armenia,” at http://unfpa.am/sites/default/files/DV_survey_eng.pdf.

⁶ Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, art. 14.1, at <http://www.parliament.am/parliament.php?id=constitution&lang=eng#>.

coordination and revision in line with the penal code, which is due to be reformed overall in 2016.

Additionally, Armenia is a party both to CEDAW and its Optional Protocol. They have reviewed the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations from Armenia's fourth and fifth periodic reports in 2009 and will submit their next periodic report to the CEDAW Committee in 2014. On October 18, the government held a consultation with civil society and interested international organizations to discuss the draft CEDAW report. The government has indicated that the draft report was revised to take into consideration recommendations and suggestions made during the meeting.

Current Public Debate

During my visit to Armenia, as noted above, I learned about an ongoing vituperative public debate in response to the passage of the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, which was approved by the government in May. The debate focused on the term "gender," what it means, and how it has been used in global documents, particularly by the United Nations. Without going into extensive background on the term "gender equality," it is a term that has been used by the United Nations, other international organizations and many countries around the world to make it clear that providing equal rights and opportunities for women and men requires a more comprehensive response than simply eliminating discrimination based on sex.

Opponents of the law argued publicly that the law on "gender" equality undermines the traditional notions of the family and fosters homosexuality. The materials they circulated misrepresented the purpose of the law creating public uncertainty, confusion and fear, and furthermore led to personal attacks on both government officials and NGO leaders that supported the law. At the time of my visit, the government proposed to delete the reference to "gender" and its definition to quell the controversy. This proposed change was going to be debated in the Parliament. International donors and NGO representatives were preparing their responses to this proposal and to the public debate more broadly.⁷ While debate is a natural and important part of a democratic system, when it turns from discussion of facts and evidence to the dissemination of misinformation and threats against NGO and government leaders, it seems to have crossed a line from healthy debate to the fostering of intolerance.

I have been informed by the government that it was because of the misunderstanding of the term "gender" that the Women's Council issued its statement in support of gender equality and women's rights, which is attached to this report. Additionally, NGOs, together with the UNDP Yerevan office, have prepared a table with explanations of the term "gender". The government also reports that the police have identified the perpetrators of the online attacks against women's NGOs. Finally, the government has decided to postpone the adoption of the amendments to the law for a year. I commend

⁷ I learned after my visit that Parliament is not planning on making any amendments to the gender equality law and will consider reopening the discussion of the law in one year. I will continue to monitor the situation as the debate and action around this legislation continues.

the government for these actions taken in response to the public attacks and its firm support for gender equality.

Women's Political Participation

Women make up only 10.69% of the representatives in Parliament⁸, significantly below the global target of 30% and among the lowest level of OSCE participating states. While there has been little increase in the percentage of women in Parliament during the last twenty years, the largest increase in women representatives has come from the ruling party. This progress, if continued at the current rate, means it is likely to take years to reach the 20% threshold required by the law and the 30% threshold set out in the Strategic Action Plan on Gender Policy with the current quota system.⁹

For the 2012 elections, Armenian law required that 20% of candidates on political party lists were women. This was an increase from the 2007 requirement, which required that 15% of candidates be women. Despite this required 5% increase in the number of women candidates, the actual percentage of women candidates increased by less than 1%, rising from 22.6% in 2007 to 22.9% in 2012. This change in the quota had little impact on the percentage of women on party lists. One reason the quota has not been achieved is the specific wording and implementation of the Armenian Electoral Code. For example, it permits women to be lower on the electoral lists than men (the first woman should be number six on the list and then every fifth person after that on the list has to be a woman). Furthermore, the electoral law has a loophole that allows parties to replace women candidates, who self-withdraw from the election, with men without violating the quota requirements. Due to the nature of a proportional representation electoral system, the wording of the electoral law, and the system of self-withdrawal, very few women are actually elected off of party lists and make it to Parliament.¹⁰ Women can also run in districts that elect representatives by majority vote, but the percentage of women winning these races is decreasing due to tough competition, increasing commercialization of elections and negative campaigning. Only two women were elected in the 41 majoritarian districts in 2012.

The level of women's representation in the Executive branch is also low. As of December 25, 2013, two of 18 ministers are women, and women account for seven of 60 deputy ministers. At the state and local level, there are no women governors (out of 10 provinces) and only one deputy governor. Out of 21 city mayors, none are women, and of the 51 deputy mayors only one is a woman.¹¹ The Vice-Speaker of the National Assembly reported in a meeting that the ruling party is undertaking efforts to build women's capacity at the local level in order to help prepare women for careers in politics and thereby address the lack of female representation.

NGOs have called for changes throughout the electoral and governmental system to increase the representation of women in government. These recommendations have

⁸ "Armenia," at http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2013_A.htm.

⁹ "Women's Political Participation in the 2012 Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Armenia".

¹⁰ "Women's Political Participation in the 2012 Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Armenia".

¹¹ "2013 Civil Society Monitoring Country Report," Preliminary Draft.

included the implementation of a law, which would require women candidates who withdraw their candidacy to be replaced by another woman. NGOs have also urged the implementation of a new, more effective, quota law, which would actually lead to 20% (or 30% in line with the SAP) of parliamentary seats being filled by women.¹²

Violence Against Women

As noted earlier, Armenia has developed a comprehensive Strategic Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence. This plan calls for better monitoring of the prevalence of domestic violence, information campaigns to increase awareness about domestic violence and how to combat it, and the provision of social services among other things. The Criminal Code does not specifically make gender-based violence, including domestic violence, a crime and does not address prevention, protection, and prosecution specifically with regards to violence against women. A draft Domestic Violence Law was developed over several years by a group of government and non-governmental representatives consulting with international experts. However, the government returned this draft law for further coordination and revision on the grounds that some provisions were inconsistent with existing provisions of the penal code and that a comprehensive reform of the penal law was expected in 2016. The government noted that during this process all aspects of domestic violence should be considered, including prevention, protection and prosecution. Nonetheless, several NGOs involved in this effort were surprised by this outcome as they believed a consensus on the law had been reached by the working group, which included representatives of the Ministry of Justice.

The government has also noted that one outcome of the consultations on domestic violence is the preparation of a new draft law “On social assistance” which is under discussion at the National Assembly. The draft law defines domestic violence as “violent actions of physical or sexual or psychological character (abuse) by one family member against another or deprivation of economic means.”

Additional action should be taken to address the issue of domestic violence in Armenia. It became clear to me during my visit that while the government has made improvements with regard to collecting data about violence against women, there is still a lack of consensus about the prevalence of domestic violence. Part of this can be attributed to the increasing, but still low, level of reporting of incidents of violence in the family. While it may not seem publicly to be a prevalent problem in society, surveys show that 8.9% of ever-married women have been subjected to physical violence, 25% of women report instances of psychological violence, 3.3% report being subjected to sexual violence, and 61.7% report being the subject some type of controlling behavior.¹³

The Department of Police reported taking several steps to better address the problem of violence against women, including domestic violence. For example, they began collecting statistics on violence against women, including complaints filed and court referrals. They also instituted training for police on responding to domestic violence cases and have

¹² “Women’s Political Participation in the 2012 Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Armenia”.

¹³ “Nationwide Survey on Domestic Violence against Women in Armenia,” at http://unfpa.am/sites/default/files/DV_survey_eng.pdf.

undertaken significant public education efforts including offering programs in schools throughout the country. A new unit was established, led by Ms. Nelli Duryan, to deal specifically with violence against women and children. As a result, there has been an increase in reporting and court referrals, but it was noted that more public education was needed. In addition, there are ongoing efforts to increase the number of women in the police force particularly by attracting larger numbers of women to the Police Academy.

Despite a lack of substantive action at the governmental and legislative level, NGOs have taken on the task of running a hotline and shelters in order to provide services for victims of domestic violence. Currently there is no government funding of these services. According to the Strategic Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence, the government plans to provide some of these services in the future. There were no current specific budgetary proposals, however, to achieve this goal. On the international front, some important international documents regarding violence against women have been translated into Armenian including the Istanbul Convention. The government plans to undertake an internal procedure to analyze the compatibility of the Convention with internal legislation.

Gender, Peace, and Security

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was not a topic of my visit, though several women's organizations raised concerns about the impact of the conflict on women and their families living in this area. A coalition of NGOs (Goris Women's Development "Resource Center" Foundation, Society Without Violence, Democracy Today, Women's Resource Center, Peace Dialogue, Women's Rights Center, and Armenian Young Women's Association) have come together to prepare a draft report on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 in Armenia. It is still in a preliminary stage and it has not yet been shared with government officials. They report that women are particularly affected by this conflict as the entire economy of the country is weakened, which makes it more difficult for women to support their families and to access basic services like education, health care and housing.

With regard to the recognition and implementation of the goals of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, there have been some efforts in Armenia by NGOs to facilitate meetings between refugees and women living on the borders from both Azerbaijan and Armenia. NGOs have also developed projects specifically targeted at empowering youth, especially young women and girls, who are affected by the conflict to be a part of the peace process as well.¹⁴ As recommended by 1325 there are also women who serve in the peacekeeping brigade of the Armenian Armed Forces.¹⁵ While there is no formal plan or task force in place in Armenia regarding the implementation of 1325, the government notes that this issue was raised in a recent meeting of the Inter-ministerial Commission on Combating Gender-based Violence in the context of fighting gender violence as a gender security matter. They reported that it was decided to return to this issue with the aim of developing further steps.

¹⁴ "2013 Civil Society Monitoring Country Report," Preliminary Draft, pp. 10-12.

¹⁵ "2013 Civil Society Monitoring Country Report," Preliminary Draft, pp. 26.

Institutional Mechanism for Gender Equality

Armenia currently lacks an institutional mechanism to systematically advance gender equality and help implement the gender focused Strategic Action Plans and other non-discrimination and equality policies. While the action plans assign certain tasks to be undertaken in specific sectors (health, education, etc), there is no central coordinating office to ensure implementation and resolve potential conflicts. The Gender Policy Concept Paper was adopted by the Government on February 11, 2010 and calls for the creation of an institutional mechanism, but this has not yet been undertaken. There is a Women's Council headed by the Prime Minister that also includes representatives of relevant ministries, NGOs active in the field and professional associations. According to its statute, it should enhance the women's role in society, including political and economic spheres, as well as ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women. It is required to meet at least twice a year. However, it is clear that it currently lacks the capacity to systematically carry out the needed coordination and monitoring government wide. The government has requested the UNICEF office in Armenia to prepare an analysis, in consultation with NGOs, of good practices and make recommendations to the Council at its upcoming meeting in March 2014.

The CEDAW Committee in its 2009 Concluding Observations to Armenia's fourth and fifth periodic report called for the establishment of such a mechanism. The Committee noted that the current arrangement of locating the national machinery at the Department of Child, Family and Women's Affairs within the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, is not an adequate structure to be used as a mechanism. The CEDAW Committee also noted the lack of a specific gender equality division overseen by the Human Rights Defender (Ombudsman). While the Ombudsman does handle complaints of gender discrimination, the office does not have the broad coordination and monitoring powers found in such institutional mechanisms. The CEDAW Committee's main concerns focus on Armenia's need for a national mechanism capable of evaluating and monitoring policy, publicizing and promoting programs, and coordinating the national gender policies.¹⁶ Some have suggested that the Council on Women's Affairs should be strengthened to become the new institutional mechanism. In addition to creating a national mechanism, sufficient funding must be allocated for such a mechanism to function adequately.

NGOs continue to advocate for the creation of a new national mechanism, which, as recommended by CEDAW General Recommendation 6, would monitor the impact of government policies on women, observe the situation of women in the country, and create and implement new strategies to eliminate discrimination.¹⁷ Members of civil society have completed a draft proposal for a mechanism of this kind.

¹⁶ U.N. Doc CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1 (February 2, 2009), at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/229/31/PDF/N0922931.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹⁷ "General Recommendation No. 6," at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom6>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislative and Institutional Accountability

Promotion of a positive environment for advancing gender equality and women's rights

Given the very public and loud ongoing debate about the new law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, and the meaning of gender equality, it is critical that government officials at the highest levels, as well as international donors and women's non-governmental organizations, use public channels not only to disseminate factual information on what the law does and does not do, but also use this moment to try to explain to the general public how gender equality and equal rights for men and women strengthen families and the country. Clearly, it is easier to spread lies and play to fears when a society is in transition and facing difficult economic times. While women's activists and academics and others have worked for many years to advance women's rights and gender equality, this debate has captured public attention and should be used as much as possible to help women and men understand the benefits—both economic and political—of using the full potential of all of its citizens.

Institutional Mechanism

1. Armenia should develop an institutional mechanism, which has the mandate and authority to coordinate and facilitate the implementation of the gender-focused Strategic Action Plans and gender equality legislation. Such a mechanism should have the ability to resolve any conflicts that may arise within or between ministries with regard to the implementation of Armenia's gender policy. It needs to be adequately funded and provided with other necessary resources in order to fully carry out its mandate. Echoing the calls of the CEDAW Committee, I recommend Armenia refer to CEDAW General Recommendation 6 and the Beijing Platform for Action for guidance on the development of a national mechanism for the advancement of women.
2. The Armenian government and international organizations must challenge the extremists whose protests and threats have crippled the progress of the gender equality law. In order to do this, the government must explain what gender equality means and what the gender equality law intends to do. This type of information should be disseminated through public education efforts.¹⁸
3. Strategic Action Plans – Armenia is to be commended for developing a number of strategic plans and concepts regarding gender equality. Next, manageable and actionable steps are needed to implement these gender equality plans. Specifically, steps must be taken to fully implement the Gender Policy Strategic Action Plan, including necessary resources.

¹⁸ I learned after my visit that Parliament is not planning on making any amendments to the gender equality law and will reopen discussion of the law in one year. I will continue to monitor the situation as the debate and action around this legislation continues.

Women's Political Participation

4. While progress is slowly being made with regards to increasing women's representation in Parliament, further steps are needed to increase the speed and intensity of this progress in order to achieve the goals set out by the government and international agencies. This requires that Armenia develop manageable and concrete steps, which will help achieve the 20% quota requirement and over time the 30% representation goal laid out in the National Action Plan and MDGs.
5. Electoral System - Armenia should consider changing its electoral law to better facilitate increased representation of women in Parliament. For example, when women self-withdraw from the party list, women candidates should replace them. The quota law, more generally, should be changed to require that 20% of parliamentary seats be filled by women, not 20% of party lists must be women. This approach has been successful in many other countries.

Violence Against Women

6. Government agencies should continue to encourage reporting of violence against women. Police should continue to initiate referrals to prosecutors and courts of reported cases of violence against women, including domestic violence. The country should also track their outcomes, continue to provide education and training to police, and extend their public education activities to schools and more broadly to the public.
7. The Parliament should revise the penal code to specifically make violence against women and domestic violence a crime. This is a critical step in building a societal norm that domestic violence is unacceptable and will not be tolerated by the society. This can lead to more effective implementation of laws and policies to combat domestic violence.
8. The government should fully and comprehensively implement the Strategic Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence. This requires that the country develop actionable steps to help in achieving the goals set out in this plan. Additionally, adequate resources must be set aside for the complete execution of this plan.
9. The Armenian government should translate the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) into Armenian and disseminate it throughout society.
10. Armenia should proceed with its analysis of the compatibility of the Istanbul Convention with its internal legislation so it can move forward with signing and ratifying the Istanbul Convention.

Gender, Peace, and Security

11. Armenia should develop and adopt a comprehensive action plan regarding the implementation of UN Security Resolution 1325.

CEDAW Report

12. CEDAW Shadow Report – The OSCE Mission should consider supporting and facilitating collaboration among the NGO community to prepare a comprehensive shadow report for the CEDAW Committee.

List of state representatives who met with Ms. June Zeitlin

- Mr. Ashot Hovakimian, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Ms. Karine Soudjian, Head of Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues Division
- Mr. Filaret Berikian, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Issues
- Ms. Hermine Naghdalian, Vice Speaker of National Assembly, member of Women's Council
- Ms. Elinar Vardanyan, Head of Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs
- General Major Aram Zaqaryan, Head of Criminal Investigation Department of the Police
- Mr. Karen Andreasyan, Ombudsman of the Republic of Armenia
- Ms. Karine Haroutyunian, Deputy Minister of Education and Science
- Ms. Astghik Mirzakhanyan Advisor to Prime Minister's Women's Council

List of civil society and interagency representatives who met with Ms. June Zeitlin.

- Women Resource Center Armenia NGO
- Women Rights Center NGO
- Women's Support Center NGO
- Society without Violence NGO
- Zangakatun Charitable NGO
- Sexual Assault Crisis Center NGO
- Public Information Need of Knowledge NGO
- Association of Women with University Education NGO
- ProMedia Gender NGO
- Syunik Women's Resource Centers Network
- Gender Thematic Group Members
- Society without Violence NGO

Statements about the Current Debate surrounding the Gender Equality Law

Statement by the Women's Council on November 22, 2013:

The Women's Council chaired by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia expresses concern at the current tension in society generated by the recent misinterpretation of the terms "gender" and "gender equality". These misinterpretations are being articulated by some non-governmental organizations, leaders of political movements, as well as politicians. The Women's Council finds it necessary to make certain clarifications concerning the meaning of the above-mentioned terms and in relation to their usage in the context of international commitments by the Republic of Armenia.

In 1993 the Republic of Armenia assumed certain commitments aimed at eliminating all types of discrimination against women by ratifying a legally binding document, namely the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Types of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Article 2 of the Convention, in particular, refers to the problems related to the elimination of discrimination against women, to which the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women provided the following clarification: "Convention covers gender-based discrimination against women. The term "sex" here refers to biological differences between men and women. The term "gender" refers to socially constructed identities and roles of women and men in society resulting in hierarchical relationships between women and men. This social positioning of women and men is affected by political, economic, religious and other factors. The application of the Convention to gender-based discrimination is made clear by the definition of discrimination contained in Article 1.

In order to ensure the implementation of the provisions of Article 2 of the Convention, as well as Point 13 of the Committee's recommendations (CEDAW/C/ARM/4/Rev.1) relating to Armenia, that is, accelerating the adoption of the law on gender equality, the Republic of Armenia law "On Provision of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men" was elaborated and adopted by the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia on 20 May 2013. The adoption of the law and its further implementation will represent serious progress in terms of ensuring equality between women and men in Armenia.

Being faithful to its commitments to respect, protect and promote women's rights, to ensure the development of women, their progress and actual and legal equality with men, the Republic of Armenia will continue realizing programs aimed at solving the abovementioned problems, including the 2011-2015 strategic programs on gender policy and against gender-based violence. The Republic of Armenia will continue cooperation with international organizations, through preparing and presenting to the UN the 5th and 6th joint reports as required by CEDAW, and the 2nd report on the Universal Periodic Review process. The Republic of Armenia will also proceed with the implementation of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy for the years 2014-2017 and other important documents.

At the same time, being concerned by the fact that representatives of some women's NGOs are intimidated and harassed in social networks and offensive articles are published by some media outlets, we advocate for an end to such behavior. We also urge the law enforcement bodies of the Republic of Armenia to be more vigilant in order to prevent such cases and, if needed, to punish the perpetrators.

On 25 November, on the eve of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Women's Council reiterates its determination to continue efforts towards prevention and elimination of violence against women

The Women's Council finds it appropriate to attract more attention to the coverage of women's rights and gender equality in the future, in cooperation with NGOs and international organizations".

The full version of the Statement is available on the Armenian Government official webpage - <http://gov.am/am/announcements/>

Statement by UN House representatives of international organizations present in Armenia on November 25, 2013:

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, representatives of the UN, US, EU, OSCE and Council of Europe Office in Yerevan welcome the 22 November statement of the Women's Council chaired by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia reaffirming the Government's commitment to gender equality.

We highly commend the determination of the Women's Council to adhere to Armenia's international commitments on gender equality, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Types of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to which Armenia is signatory since 1993. We also encourage Armenia's signature of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

Furthermore we also support the Council's call to ensure the effective implementation of the law "On Provision of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men."

We also support the call to the law-enforcement bodies to undertake all the necessary measures to prevent and prosecute intimidation of individuals and organizations working on gender equality and women's rights.

We acknowledge the Armenian Government's efforts towards harmonization of domestic legislation with international standards, as well as implementation of provisions and commitments of international legal documents to which Armenia is party.

Gender equality is a cornerstone of democratic governance and sustainable development. We reiterate our willingness and determination to support the Government

of Armenia in the further implementation of legislation on non-discrimination and equal rights and opportunities of men and women.

The full version of the Statement is available on the webpage - <http://www.am.undp.org/content/armenia/en/home/presscenter/speeches/2013/11/25/joint-statement-on-gender-equality/>.