



Human rights as an integral part of the OSCE's approach to security

OSCE Chairmanship and EU Presidency Event to Mark the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Vienna, 15 December 2008

Keynote speech by Minister Elisabeth Rehn, Representative of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentleman,

It is a great pleasure to address this joint OSCE-EU event marking the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on behalf of the Finnish 2008 Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The Declaration has played a significant role in building up a legal framework for human rights. It is not only the cornerstone of international human rights law. It is also a source of inspiration for the Helsinki process of the CSCE and for the OSCE as we know it today.

The participating States of the OSCE have through the 1975 Helsinki Final Act committed to act in conformity with the principles and purposes of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This commitment includes also the pledge to act in accordance with the obligations set by international human rights treaties that the participating States may be bound by. The Finnish Chairmanship is particularly pleased that the participating States in the 2008 Helsinki Ministerial Council meeting reaffirmed their strong commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Since 1975 we have witnessed considerable improvements in the respect, protection and promotion of human rights in the OSCE region. However, a lot remains to be done to ensure full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

I really hope that in the future in official speeches human rights are not the last point, but in the beginning of those speeches as human rights are the best means to secure peace, security and prosperity. These commitments need to be turned into deeds. The individual and her/ his human rights must be set at the forefront of international and national action and statements. Human rights should prevail over the interests' states and their authorities. This is not always the reality in today's world.

The respect for human rights has not only been an upward trend since 1975. We have had to witness conflict situations in our region and elsewhere in which the respect for human rights and international humanitarian law has been put to test at the cost of individual suffering. Statistics show that whereas during the First World War one victim in ten was a civilian, today the number of civilian casualties outnumbers that of military casualties. Women are the ones that suffer most of and face a growing and unproportional risk for insecurity and violence. Women have become deliberate objects of attack and violence against women a method of warfare.

I will be speaking today much about the human rights of women. I am doing this because women's human rights are still weak and partly because I have worked with women's rights for decades, including in conflict areas.

The victimisation of women and girls is widespread across all regions experiencing armed conflict. Gender-based violence was systematic at a large scale in the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990's. Although the plight of civilians in the recent armed conflict in Georgia was heavy, we can note that so far there have not been many reports on gender-based violence during and in the aftermath of that conflict. Having said this, not one single case of gender-based violence is acceptable. Rape is always rape and the perpetrators of sexual as well as other gender-based violence must be put to justice. We must end the impunity of these perpetrators.

Also children, different minorities, including ethnic minorities, disabled and the elderly are among those groups that are particularly vulnerable and prone to human rights violations, including violence. Such patterns of violence impede the development and functioning of pluralistic democracies based on the respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The fundamental principle of non-discrimination was already enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The protection of women's rights has been further enhanced through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. As practical steps forward, the Statutes of the criminal tribunals for Rwanda and former Yugoslavia as well as that of the International Criminal Court include rape as crime. Now, the international community needs to work towards ensuring sufficient counselling and protection for women, who have become victims of rape or other forms of abuse. It takes courage to testify after such an ordeal. The victims should not be the ones to suffer again when they testify in criminal justice proceedings.

In 2000 the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security - a landmark resolution aimed at enhancing women's empowerment and participation in conflict prevention, resolution and participation in post-conflict reconstruction. In June this year the UN Security Council took another major step forward by condemning rape and sexual violence against women in armed conflicts as a humanitarian crime and by highlighting the link between the combat against sexual violence and the maintenance of international peace and security (UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008)).

The OSCE participating States have committed themselves to implement resolution 1325 and condemned violence against women through the OSCE Action Plan on Promoting Gender Equality. What we need now is concrete action to turn those obligations and commitments into real terms. I am pleased to say that Finland has launched her national 1325 Action Plan in September this year.

For the promotion of the human rights of women it is important that women's victimisation is rejected and action taken to prevent it. However, this is only one side of the coin. In order to ensure full realisation of the rights of women, women should be involved in decision-making processes at all levels. This includes also situations whenever the protection of women and girls in the prevention, during and after conflict is determined, debated and decided. To make this a reality more women must be in high-level positions in decision-making both nationally and internationally. Involvement in negotiation processes must be based on a true participation and possibility to influence the negotiations.

By this we can ensure that women's perspective is taken into account and that decisions taken are comprehensive and effective. In many cases women are primarily responsible for implementing negotiated agreements and sustainable solutions cannot be achieved without their involvement. The whole society profits from women's participation. It is not only an equality issue. For example, where

would we be in terms of gender equality had not a woman delegate from India in the negotiations preceding the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights put forth a proposal on including sex as one of the explicit grounds on which discrimination is to be prohibited?

Freedom of expression and the freedoms of assembly and association are essential for democratic participation and for the existence of a pluralistic society. It is crucial to ensure the involvement of women human rights defenders and non-governmental organisations promoting the rights of women in the debate on women's rights and in the human rights discussions in general. For instance, the active and brave work of women human rights defenders and NGO's in the former Yugoslavia contributed to the fact that rape in armed conflict is today acknowledged internationally as a war crime.

An active involvement of women contributes also to the development of a pluralistic civil society and is beneficial to awareness-raising initiatives on women's rights. It is of importance that the OSCE and its field operations in cooperation with the ODIHR and the Gender Section of the OSCE Secretariat have initiated projects and seminars with the involvement of the civil society on how to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

In conflict prevention it is essential to address the worrying trend of increased numbers of hate crimes across the OSCE region in recent years. Regrettably, hate-motivated attacks continue to be directed towards in particular Jews, Muslims as well as migrants, Roma, and refugees across the OSCE area. Also hate-motivated violent crimes against gays, lesbians and transgendered persons have increased which requires our common responses.

Freedom of expression, including the freedom of the media, is a fundamental human right that is essential in the work against hate crimes. This freedom should be exercised in a spirit of respect for the principle of non-discrimination and the pluralism of our societies.

Women can make a significant contribution to the fight against hate crimes and trends of intolerance, including by means of their role as mothers and educators. All hate crimes must be met with zero tolerance by the participating States and every effort must be taken to fight these crimes together with civil society actors. In addition, it is of utmost importance to share experiences and raise awareness on the multiple discrimination faced by women themselves in order to be able to tackle this complex phenomenon. By multiple discrimination women are marginalised not only because of their gender but because of variable combined factors, such as ethnic origin, religion, physical or mental health conditions etc.

Women and girls form a majority of the world's refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Having escaped the arm of conflict, they are still at risk of becoming victims of their immediate protectors: humanitarian aid workers and civilian and military crisis management personnel. It is absolutely crucial for states and organisations involved in humanitarian work to include gender-sensitive training for personnel participating in crisis management or humanitarian aid. Codes of conduct for crisis management staff must include the prevention and prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse as well as the prevention of human trafficking. Staff not meeting the demands of such codes should be immediately repatriated and their conduct should be investigated. It is important that the OSCE together with other international organisations uphold a zero-tolerance approach for sexual exploitation and human trafficking in all their activities.

To conclude, it is the participating States that bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the protection of women against violence. States can through the adoption of laws that ensure the equal participation and rights of women contribute not only to institutional changes, but also to a change of attitudes. As long as domestic violence is socially and, what is worse, legally acceptable or practically unpunishable, there is no future for the eradication of violence against women in conflict situations. Here, the OSCE

can make a difference in supporting further concrete action by the participating States and civil society actors. The Finnish Chairmanship looks forward to the Handbook on combating violence against women to be published by the OSCE Gender Secretariat in early 2009 and commends the seminar organised in October on this theme considered extremely timely and topical by the Chairmanship-in-Office.

I look forward to the contributions by other keynote speakers as well as the participating States and non-governmental organisations. I believe these discussions can further contribute to the ensuring effective implementation of OSCE commitments and other international obligations by the participating States. It is nothing less than our common responsibility to fight impunity and to promote human dignity in all circumstances.

Thank you.