



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF UKRAINE

1050th FSC Plenary Meeting
(21 June 2023)

Agenda Item 1, Security Dialogue:

Women's leadership in times of conflict and war and their role in the armed forces, diplomacy and beyond

Madam Chairperson,

At the outset, allow me to express our gratitude to the Bulgarian FSC Chairpersonship for the organisation of this Security Dialogue dedicated to the discussion on women's leadership in times of war and their role in the armed forces and diplomacy. We are also grateful to all our today's panellists for their insightful presentations and valuable contributions to our discussion.

The topic of today's Security dialogue is both timely and relevant especially for Ukraine as a country that continues to counter an unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression waged by the Russian Federation. The contributions and leadership of women are critical to the conflict resolution and to ensuring meaningful and sustainable peace.

Ukraine pays special attention to the issue of the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the security and defence sector. In line with the 1999 Istanbul Document, gender equality is an important element of Ukraine's national policy and one of the Government's priorities.

Today, a trend is unfolding in Ukraine, when women are becoming active participants in the fight for our country's freedom, and not just victims of war.

Women have served in the Armed Forces of Ukraine since independence proclamation in 1991, but mostly in auxiliary roles. Since 2014, the Armed Forces of Ukraine have changed significantly. Russia's annexation of Crimea and aggression in eastern Ukraine served as an impetus for changes. Powerful military and civil voluntary movements emerged in Ukraine, in which women played a prominent role.

In 2014, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine recorded the first surge in the number of women in the Armed Forces. The second one happened in 2022, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. That is, women reacted sharply and continue to react to the threat to state sovereignty due to military aggression.

Currently, there are over 60,000 women in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, of which almost 43,000 are military personnel (2.5 times more compared to 2014). The number of female officers increased to almost 7,500, which is almost five times more than in 2014.

With approximately 5,000 women who are currently serving at the frontline, one cannot underestimate the scale and nature of the contribution that Ukrainian women make to the defence of their country against the aggressor state.

One of several Deputy Ministers of Defence of Ukraine is a woman – Hanna Maliar. In 2021, the first female brigadier general appeared in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Tetyana Ostashchenko, commander of the Medical Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Although, there are only three female generals in the history of Ukraine, with available opportunities there will undoubtedly be many more of them in the near future.

With the increase in the number of women in the Armed Forces, the number of women veterans is increasing as well. Thus, today there are 38 thousand of them from among the participants in hostilities.

As of the end of 2022, during the full-scale war, 350 Ukrainian service women were awarded state awards. Two of them received the highest title of Heroes of Ukraine (posthumously). To date, there are many more such heroines.

The war became an impetus for fairly rapid gender integration in the security and defence sector in Ukraine. Due to the active position of the servicewomen themselves and with the support of the public, in particular, the "Invisible Battalion" movement, needed amendments were introduced to Ukrainian legislation. They allow women to fully realize themselves in the army.

In 2016, combat positions were opened for women. To date, all restrictions have been lifted for female military personnel for any positions that currently exist in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Since 2018, the recruitment of girls to study at military and naval lyceums has been allowed. In 2023 female officers, who will be able to hold leadership positions, are expected to graduate.

In 2018, amendments were made to a number of legislative acts, including to the Law of Ukraine "On Military Duty and Military Service". Now women perform military duty on an equal footing with men. In particular, women are involved in performing tasks as part of the daily watch. The exception are cases provided for by legislation on the protection of childhood and maternity.

At the same time, the recruitment of women into military service, as before, is voluntary. However, women of medical and pharmaceutical specialities are now subject to mandatory military registration.

The institute of a gender adviser was created, which makes proposals for the implementation of state policy on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men, combating violence and discrimination based on gender, in particular in the Armed Forces. Efforts are being taken to promote a more female-friendly military culture. For example, in families where both parents serve in the armed forces, parental leave is no longer the exclusive prerogative of mothers.

Public attitudes towards female soldiers have improved significantly in Ukraine over the past few years. For example, the percentage of Ukrainians who agree that women in the military should have equal opportunities with men has risen sharply from 53% in 2018 to 80% in 2022.

One of the proofs of the recognition of the role of women in the army, and the society's appreciation of their contribution, was the renaming of the Day of Defenders of Ukraine into the Day of male and female Defenders of Ukraine in 2021.

Madam Chairperson,

Armed aggression disproportionately affects women and men, primarily the civilian population. Women remain more vulnerable to the negative consequences of the armed aggression.

Nearly a third of Ukrainians were forced to flee their homes following the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Displacement has had the greatest impact on women due to the increased burden of caring for children and other family members who need care. Of the approximately 7.9 million internally displaced persons in Ukraine, women currently make up more than 60 %. 66 % of internally displaced persons do not have a job, among them 70 % are women.

Another problem is gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence. In all territories of Ukraine liberated by the Ukrainian Army, numerous cases of conflict-related sexual violence committed by the military of the Russian Federation were recorded. Women and girls make up the majority of victims.

Sexual violence is another weapon in the war, an element of psychological pressure and intimidation. We are talking about both crimes against civilian women and

crimes against those in captivity. Currently, Ukrainian law enforcement agencies have documented at least 170 cases of sexual violence, which reflect only those cases when the victims were ready to testify. In fact, there are many more such crimes.

Hundreds of women continue to be detained in Russian captivity, where in complete violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War they are widely subjected to ill-treatment and torture. After spending 3 months in Russian captivity, famous Ukrainian paramedic, Yulia Paevska (code name Taira) said: «Those detained there are totally deprived of any rights and treated like slaves».

When Ukraine returned 15 servicewomen from the Russian captivity in April 2022, all of them had their heads shaved. This is another way to humiliate women. The occupiers also resorted to psychological pressure on women, blackmailing them with threats against their relatives and children.

These and other barbaric actions by the Russian occupiers go against the very nature of a human being and constitute a gross violation of International Humanitarian Law. Ukraine will continue to document the crimes of Russian military personnel and officials involved in such criminal acts in order to bring them to justice.

Madam Chairperson,

Taking into account the needs and problems of women affected by the conflict, as well as women involved in the settlement of the international armed conflict, is one of the key tasks of the Ukrainian government. This is supported by relevant government documents.

Ukraine became the first UN member state to adopt the National Action Plan "Women, Peace, Security" in times of conflict. The first such plan was adopted in 2016. In 2020, the second national action plan for the period until 2025 was introduced.

In December 2022, against the background of destruction of civilian infrastructure by Russia and war crimes committed by Russian servicemen against women, including the use of sexual violence as a weapon, Ukraine's second national action plan was updated. It is aimed at expanding the participation of women in the process of responding to armed aggression and post-war reconstruction, helping victims of sexual violence related to armed conflict, providing support to people living in temporarily occupied territories and in areas of hostilities, to those who are in captivity, forcibly deported to the Russian Federation or forced to go abroad.

In August 2022, Ukraine adopted the State Strategy for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men for the period until 2030. This comprehensive strategic document identified the priority areas of consolidated actions of central and local executive bodies, local self-government bodies, civil society institutions, and business entities to reduce gender inequality in all spheres of society's life.

Ukraine became the first country to create a comprehensive coordination mechanism to combat conflict-related sexual violence, by signing a Framework Agreement on cooperation with the UN Special Representative on these issues last year. This mechanism covers 5 main areas: access to justice and accountability, comprehensive assistance to victims, strengthening the security and defence sector to prevent violence, combating human trafficking, and reparations and compensation.

In June 2022, Ukraine ratified the Istanbul Convention, which will strengthen the legal protection of victims of violence and provide them with access to justice, will make it possible to protect Ukrainian citizens who have suffered from violence not only in Ukraine, but also abroad.

Ukraine remains fully convinced that the implementation of UNSC resolution 1325 will only be effective if national efforts are complemented by with international cooperation organisations. In this regard, Ukraine has always supported the OSCE's efforts to develop a regional plan to implement UNSC resolution 1325.

We strongly believe that the respective work on this issue will continue within our Organisation in order to contribute to the empowerment of women and promote the importance of women's participation and leadership in all aspects of peace and security.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.