



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities

address by
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to the
Geneva Peace Week side-event:

**‘From Margin to Centre: Acknowledging & Strengthening Minority Women’s Role in
Peacebuilding**

[Check against delivery]

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Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,

This is my first time participating in Geneva Peace Week and I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss a topic that is timely and relevant to my work – the role of minority women in peacekeeping. I would like to thank the OSCE's Senior Gender Adviser, Lara Scarpitta, for inviting me to be a part of this event, as well as her office, and our partners at the Council of Europe and Legal Action Worldwide.

As OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, my mandate is to act as an instrument of conflict prevention and early warning at the earliest stage with regard to national minority issues. This involves identifying and working to de-escalate tensions quietly and impartially. My work is guided by the principle of integration with respect for diversity. This is based on the understanding that diverse societies that are integrated across all aspects of life, including public, social and economic life, are more cohesive, stable and resilient.

Through my work, I am aware of the crucial role that gender plays in conflict prevention. While we have witnessed an increased recognition of the positive relationship between gender equality and peace, the specific role that *minority* women play in peace and security is often overlooked or misunderstood. Today, I would like to shed more light on the challenges that minority women face in conflicts and in peace processes, as well as highlight the enormous contributions that minority women can make to peacebuilding efforts.

One of the ways that my office aims to address the long-term causes of tensions related to national minority issues is through the development of recommendations and guidelines on recurrent issues that the successive High Commissioners have come across in their work. Over the past 30 years, we have published ten sets of Recommendations and Guidelines that offer concrete advice to policymakers on a range of issues relevant to national minorities, and guide my daily engagement with the OSCE participating States. To add to this series, we are currently working on recommendations on national minority women and conflict prevention.

We know that women and girls from minority communities can be particularly vulnerable to the effects of discrimination on multiple grounds, often operating simultaneously. In my office,

we are looking into how we can better recognize and understand how these multiple forms of discrimination interact. Our aim is to offer concrete recommendations to States on how they can develop policies that address and remove obstacles to women's empowerment and participation in society.

Our most recent set of recommendations *on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Social and Economic Life* are also relevant to today's discussion, as they place particular emphasis on the inclusion of minority women. The engagement of women from ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious minority communities, and any combination thereof, is essential for reinforcing inclusive democracy, strengthening social cohesion, preventing marginalization and unlocking potential for socio-economic development. I brought a few copies with me here today and invite anyone who is interested to take a copy or read the publication online.

I want to include a sidenote here to underline a point on data. One of the clearest challenges that is faced in policy development on issues related to minorities in general, and minority women in particular, is the lack of disaggregated data. I know this is not a new lament among organizations in our fields, but it is worth repeating in the hope that more States will support the responsible collection of disaggregated data. The collection of data based on, for example, ethnicity and gender may be sensitive and controversial in some contexts, but policies are more effective when they are evidence-based and designed to work in specific real-world circumstances.

An initiative that greatly helps guide my work on policies related to national minority women and conflict prevention is the Women Peace and Security Agenda, which is a cross-cutting priority for the whole of the OSCE. The OSCE's concept of comprehensive security means it is well-placed to work with States to integrate gender perspectives into politico-military commitments, including in the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

From the perspective of my mandate, it is especially important that I advocate for the inclusion of *minority* women in particular. Peacebuilding efforts that encourage minority women to participate alongside women from majority communities are often more responsive to the needs of the people directly affected by tensions and conflicts, and lead to more stable outcomes.

I am grateful to be here today to learn from you and to expand my own understanding, especially from a global perspective. The theme of this year's Geneva Peace Week – Peace in Action – calls for adaptive, inclusive and collaborative approaches to peace, with an emphasis on finding actionable solutions. This aligns fully with my mandate and my approach. My success in preventing conflict and providing early warning is significantly increased by partnering and collaborating with other international organizations, such as the UN and Council of Europe, and drawing on their experiences. My work requires a great deal of creativity, awareness raising and careful diplomacy, all of which are made better through initiatives like Geneva Peace Week.

Thank you for your attention.