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ADDRESS

**by Dr Dimitrij Rupel, OSCE Chairman-in-Office,
at the Workshop on Violence Against Women in the 21 Century,
28-29 April 2005, Paris**

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me express my gratitude to our French hosts and especially to my colleague Michel for the hard work done in organizing today's event and the hospitality we enjoy here in Paris.

When preparing for today's event, I typed the phrase "violence against women" in one of the search engines on the internet. It returned almost 14 million hits. This shows the significance of today's topic.

Violence against women is a widespread global problem and major obstacle to women's expression of free will and the progress of humanity towards equality, development and peace. It violates and impairs or even nullifies the possibility of women to freely exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Ten years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the issue of violence against women is one of few critical areas defined in the Beijing Platform where a noticeable progress has been made in recognizing and quantifying problems. New statutory provisions and mechanisms have also been defined at all levels, aimed at the prevention, prosecution and punishment of this violence.

Unfortunately, not much has been done to remove the key economic, social and cultural reasons for violence against women. Furthermore, greater efforts should have been made to implement improved legislation and to introduce efficient assistance to victims and survivors.

It is unquestionable that the prime responsibility for ensuring gender equality and combating violence against women falls above all on individual states and their governments. The OSCE can, together with other international organizations and institutions, stimulate their efforts in tackling these issues.

Mr Chairman,

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has been developing and implementing its activities in combating violence against women through its bodies and institutions as well as field missions in all OSCE regions. The activities span through the areas of

education and training of women, violence against women, women in armed conflicts, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and human rights of women.

The Organization's approach is based on safeguarding the continuity, providing long-term impact by adopting a three-phase implementation strategy of awareness raising, local capacity building and national expertise development.

The OSCE with its unique approach to the issue of security and its mandate has the potential to become one of the leading players in building consensus and partnerships among all participating States against all kinds of violence against women. This can only succeed if all partners in these endeavours share the same view on the essence of the problem and apply the same analytic and action tools.

However the OSCE cannot, neither is there any need for it to, shoulder all activities in this domain. Yet, everything must be done to jointly analyze the situation, define strategic tasks and reach agreement on the distribution of work at the international level and in the countries in which the OSCE has its field missions. Notwithstanding the very demanding nature of this task, I believe it will also create necessary synergy and provide the maximum added value with the minimum increase in efforts and resources.

The success of the OSCE in conducting its policy towards violence against women rests upon;

- consistent adherence to gender equality principles in recruiting personnel at all levels – particularly at senior positions, where the absence of women is most noticeable;
- planning and implementing all its programmes and projects;
- creating gender sensitive and inclusive corporative culture; and
- fast and consistent responding anytime those conducting its policy might turn from problem-solving players into players aggravating the problem.

To effectively combat the issue of violence against women and guarantee that the system achievements do not remain merely lifeless institutions and unimplemented laws it is necessary to:

- Establish strategic partnerships with domestic civil society players and government structures responsible for gender equality, with their co-operation and mutual growth constantly encouraged;
- Promote participation of women in political decision-making and democratic processes;
- Create and/or strengthen national mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming;
- Support amendments of national legislation and inclusion of the highest internationally applicable standards for the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Establish strong partnerships among international and civil society players, national governments, parliaments, political parties, experts and the media.

We also believe that the donor participating States should supplement their bilateral cooperation by granting support to well devised regional projects aiming at resolving main problems linked to violence against women.

Furthermore, we see a particular role for the media in supporting the endeavours of individual states and international organizations in tackling the issue at hand. In the contemporary societies, the media have an important role and impact on issues relating to violence against women. Unfortunately, they frequently echo the low level of public awareness about the issue, and when they do devote attention to these issues, they often do not adhere to the basic codes of journalism ethics and present them in a sensationalist manner. Therefore, the role of the media should be re-considered and they should be engaged as an active player contributing to the change in public opinion and awareness raising on violence against women.

Mr Chairman,

As we can see, much has been done along this successful path, which the OSCE has so significantly paved thus far. Yet, there still remains some room for plugging the loopholes that have been left behind. The OSCE is the right forum to act as an interlinking and guiding force in the efforts of various actors on the international scene. Nevertheless, the changes can only be made if we start at the beginning – that is with ourselves. If WE notice the obstacles facing the women and if WE believe we can overcome them, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. With this in mind, I wish you all very fruitful discussion and forward-looking outcomes of this meeting.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.