

Ms. Beatriz Balbin
First Deputy Director
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

ENGLISH only

Remarks for the Gender Equality Review Conference
Working Session Five: Strengthening Institutional Mechanisms for Gender
Mainstreaming – Challenges and Perspectives

Vienna, 11 July 2014

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been a pleasure and privilege to participate in the OSCE Gender Equality Review Conference. Over the last two days, we witnessed the *immense* expertise and *courageous* work of practitioners and advocates from across the OSCE region. I am glad to contribute to this last session on *institutional mechanisms*, as we shall *ensure* that these discussions continue *beyond* this conference and stay *embedded* in the mechanisms and practices of OSCE participating States and in our own institutions.

Firstly, we should strengthen gender mainstreaming in laws and policies of the OSCE participating States. As the *2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality* states: “Effective gender-mainstreaming with the goal of achieving gender equality, is important, if full use is to be made of the human capital in the OSCE area” (Article 3). Still too often, specific needs and interests of women and men, girls and boys, remain unaddressed; their skills and talents often under-utilised.

Making democratic institutions and legislative processes more inclusive, representative, and gender-sensitive requires that *women* - also from all *marginalized* groups, including national minorities and migrants, and particularly Roma and Sinti - are given *equal access* to policymaking processes. Women’s voices *must be fully heard* when laws, policies, and budgets, are discussed. *Impact* of laws, policies and budgets on women and men must be assessed.

We must also look at *ourselves* and assess how *we* can improve gender mainstreaming within the OSCE. Over the last year, our OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has engaged in an intensive *Strategic Review* to enhance gender mainstreaming in *our programmes*. We looked frankly at how far we went beyond our regular gender activities and whether we included gender issues in *all* our work on democratization, human rights, and tolerance and non-discrimination. We have developed a *Gender Mainstreaming Road Map for 2014-2017*, clearly identifying our objectives as well as those *responsible* for their implementation.

And this brings me to my second point, namely the importance of *continuously evaluating* and *assessing* what we have done to protect and promote women’s rights and gender equality, what the *results* were, where we want to be, and who is responsible?

Assessing our own performance as well as the performance of the OSCE participating States should *not* be seen as a naming and shaming game, but rather a platform for jointly evaluating what efforts were taken, whether our targets have been met, and which new goals we may wish to reach? After all, in the *2004 OSCE Gender Action Plan*, the participating

States emphasized the importance of “providing a framework structure to ensure that gender issues (...) are *regularly* discussed and reviewed” (Article 10.b).

We must also work together to identify those that are *best placed* to guide us towards gender equality and protection of women’s rights in the OSCE region. We shall identify those that have the best gender expertise, but also those that have the authority to change things. Gender advocates and decision-makers in the OSCE participating States, our own gender experts and management in the OSCE must committedly work together to ensure gender equality in the OSCE region and in our own organisation. Achieving gender equality is a responsibility of us all.

And continuing with the idea that we must identify those *best placed* to guide us towards gender equality, we should recognize the strengths and weaknesses of our own organizations, improve exchanges and co-operation, secure synergies and avoid overlap. On this panel only, we have representatives of Council of Europe (TBC), UN Women, European External Action Service, our Office – ODIHR, OSCE Field Operations (TBC), the Gender Section in Vienna – and there are more organizations working on this issue.

All of us surely have the *best intentions* to help achieve gender equality and protection of women’s rights. But even with the best intentions, no organization can lead in *every aspect of the work* on gender equality! With leadership comes also the responsibility to share your expertise and support others.

For example, the *2004 OSCE Gender Action Plan* has tasked ODIHR to “assist participating States in developing effective measures to bring about the equal participation of women in democratic processes and (to) assist in developing best practices for their implementation” (Article 44.d). In turn, we have developed *enormous* expertise on advancing gender equality in elected office, parliaments, and political parties. Just this week, we launched our new *Handbook on Women’s Participation in Political Parties*, aiming to “promote equal participation of women and men in political parties,” as prescribed in Article 3 of the OSCE *MC Decision 7/09 on Women’s Participation in Political and Public Life*.

We gladly place our expertise at the disposal of OSCE participating States, our OSCE Field Operations, and other international and civil society partners. I call on all of us in this panel to recognise our own and others’ expertise, to *share* that expertise, and to *utilise* expertise of each other, for the benefit of gender equality and women’s rights in the OSCE region.

Finally, most importantly, it would be a paradox to discuss ways to achieve gender equality and protection of women’s rights without properly *involving women!*? And I do not mean only women present here at this conference or women leaders, women politicians, and gender advocates. I also mean young women looking for role models, the next generation of our leaders, be it social, economic, or political. Along with men, all these women need to be consulted when gender equality is being discussed. Only then will gender equality in the OSCE region respond to the talents, needs, and interests of *all* women and men.

Gender equality requires a long-term commitment and investment. In addition to gathering and working with women advocates of today, we must have a vision for the future and we must invest in the young women of tomorrow!

Thank you for your attention!