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Delegation of Belgium

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR DIDIER NAGANT DE DEUXCHAISNES,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM TO THE
OSCE, AT THE 1305th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

Vienna, 11 March 2021

International Women's Day

Madam Chairperson,

Belgium aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and, in view of the importance of the occasion, wishes to add a few words in a national capacity.

For over 100 years, we have celebrated the social, political, economic and cultural achievements of women on 8 March. Gender equality and the rights of women and girls are priorities in Belgium's domestic and foreign policies. It is to everyone's advantage to create a more inclusive world, where women and men contribute together to meet the challenges facing our societies. In this context, I should like to highlight three points today.

Firstly, in order to ensure women's equal participation in all sectors of society, we need to address the structural barriers faced by women and girls. We can do this by dismantling all discriminatory laws, investing more in girls' education and ensuring that women and girls are free from gender-based violence, have equal economic and political opportunities, can make truly free decisions about their bodies and family planning and have access to social protection. Throughout history, many women and girls have shown great leadership potential, but often patriarchal norms and stereotypes persist. We need to recognize these gender stereotypes in order to challenge them. As we discussed this week at the First Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, the media, including social media, can play an important part in promoting positive role models and messages on women's leadership.

Secondly, the importance of the full and equal participation of women as active agents of peace and security has been demonstrated time and again. Belgium is convinced that the OSCE plays an important role in promoting and supporting the regional implementation of the women, peace and security agenda and that this topic should remain high on the agenda of both the Permanent Council and the committees, and also the Forum for Security Co-operation. At the Ministerial Council meeting in 2020, 52 participating States endorsed the joint statement on United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 with a strong message to that effect. We often expect a lot from female negotiators in peace processes. In particular, we expect them to be able to represent all women in a conflict in some way. For this reason, we also have a responsibility to

facilitate the diversification of “female” representatives and the inclusion of young women, women from different regions, migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, and LGBTI+ persons.

Thirdly, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a particularly negative impact on the human rights of women and girls. There is a real risk of retrogressing in a range of areas: in the economic sphere, with rising poverty and the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work; in social security, health and sexual and reproductive rights; and in gender-based violence, which has increased dramatically. In this context, it is important to continue to allocate sufficient resources to the promotion of gender equality and to ensure women’s meaningful participation in developing responses to the crisis. We encourage the efforts of OSCE structures and institutions that take these developments into account in assisting the participating States in the implementation of our joint commitments.

Belgium will continue to be committed to protecting the rights of women and girls and to gender equality, and to encourage close co-operation among OSCE participating States in the pursuit of these goals.