



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Working Session 5: Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including: Address by the OSCE Special Representative/Adviser on Gender issues; Equal opportunity for women and men in all spheres of life, including through implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for Promotion of Gender Equality; Prevention of violence against women and children**

As prepared for delivery by David J. Kramer, U.S. Head of Delegation  
OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
Warsaw, September 23, 2015

When women and girls are empowered, educated, and equipped to contribute to their societies, their families and their countries are more likely to prosper, and be more stable and secure. Globally, however, women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty and discrimination. In some places, women's leadership and participation in politics, civil society, and the private sector continues to be hindered by lack of access to education, by discrimination, and by harassment, including in the workplace. And violence against women – particularly in conflict zones – remains too prevalent in every part of the world.

Access for girls to quality education is critical to ensure that women have the opportunity to succeed economically and to participate equally in political life. Workplaces must be free of discrimination and sexual harassment. Several OSCE participating States lack specific laws addressing sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace. Even in countries where such legislation exists, it is not always properly enforced. It is also vital that women have an equal opportunity to participate in political life to ensure that their voices and perspectives are represented in decision-making processes that affect and shape their societies.

OSCE Institutions and field presences are working to assist participating States in implementing their commitments to ensure equality of opportunity between women and men, and we support these projects and programs. We would particularly like to note the important work being done by the Women's Resource Centers, supported by the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, and the staff course for women leaders at the OSCE Border Management Staff College.

We also recall the 2013 Kyiv Ministerial Decision on Roma and Sinti Women and Children, where OSCE participating States agreed to focus their efforts to promote opportunities for Romani women and girls to access education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. We commend the Czech Republic for taking steps toward compensating Romani women who were forcibly sterilized and encourage other participating States to investigate and seek to rectify any similar incidents.

The United States remains concerned about gender-based violence throughout the OSCE region and around the globe. It crosses every social and economic class, ethnicity, race, religion, education level, and international borders. Worldwide, an estimated one in three women will be physically or sexually abused in her lifetime, and one in five will experience rape or attempted rape. In some places, especially in conflict zones, these statistics are even higher. Gender-based violence can take many forms, including intimate partner violence, female infanticide, domestic violence within the family, sexual violence, and

harmful practices such as female genital mutilation or cutting, and as a result of early and forced marriage.

In the North Caucasus, too many women continue to face honor killings, bride kidnapping, and early and forced marriage. The May wedding between a 17-year-old girl to Chechen police chief Nazhud Guchigov is a sobering reminder that the status of women and girls in this region lags far behind the progress women have made in many other parts of the modern world.

Although some OSCE participating States prosecute domestic violence under general assault laws, laws specifically against domestic violence strengthen authorities' ability to hold abusers accountable and can be drafted to relieve the victim of the burden of pressing charges. OSCE participating States that do not have specific laws against domestic violence include Armenia and Uzbekistan.

Laws alone are not enough. Law enforcement and other officials require specific training and victims require an adequate network of assistance. We welcome suggestions from the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on Gender Issues on ways the OSCE might address this problem constructively.

Unfortunately, gender-based violence during conflict has also occurred in the OSCE region. Rape was used as a weapon during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although that was more than twenty years ago, trials are still taking place and victims continue to face obstacles to justice and healing from their trauma. We welcome two landmark rulings in June by Bosnian courts that convicted some perpetrators and ordered them to pay compensation to the victims, establishing a precedent for courts to decide on financial compensation for victims during criminal proceedings. We urge Bosnian authorities at all levels to ensure that all cases – including those involving women raped by rank-and-file soldiers – move forward as expeditiously as possible. We welcome the adoption in May of legislation in Croatia recognizing rape as a war crime and providing assistance and compensation to war rape survivors through free counseling, legal and medical aid, and a monthly financial stipend.

Five years ago, women were raped in Kyrgyzstan during the inter-ethnic violence in Osh and Jalal-Abad in 2010. It remains vital that the Kyrgyz authorities bring perpetrators to justice and provide assistance to victims.

NGOs and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine have also received reports of sexual violence and rape, including by men in military uniforms. We urge the OSCE to investigate these reports, as well as to support NGO efforts to do so, with a view to assisting victims and holding perpetrators accountable.

The use of rape as a weapon of war must stop. As Secretary of State John Kerry has said, the United States is an active partner in the United Kingdom's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. Even those in the highest echelons of military or government who ordered, engaged in, or exercised command responsibility over subordinates who committed serious human rights violations, including acts of sexual violence, are not welcome in the United States. We urge all states to step up efforts to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for this heinous crime.

In conclusion, the United States encourages participating States to cooperate with the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Senior Advisor on Gender Issues, and the Chairmanship's Special Representative on Gender Issues, Melanne Verbeke. We support an Addendum to the 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and look forward to its adoption at the OSCE ministerial in Belgrade.