

*Check against delivery!*

Address by Ambassador Christian Strohal,  
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic  
Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

ATELIER SUR LES VIOLENCES  
CONTRE LES FEMMES

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to start by thanking the Chairman in Office and the French Government for organizing this Conference – a Conference which focuses on the highly important and unfortunately ever so relevant topic of violence against women. Others have already spoken about the promise of the World Conference in Beijing and the degree of its realization ten years later. Let me bring an OSCE perspective to you.

In 1991, participating States committed themselves to “eliminate all forms of violence against women, and all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women”. For quite some time, this commitment has remained rather basic and of a declaratory nature. In recent years, however, the OSCE has paid more attention to the human security of women and has adopted several important Action Plans related to the subject: We have an Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. We also have an Action Plan on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. Also the Action Plan on Improving the Situation on Roma and Sinti contains relevant elements with a focus on women.

This conference looks at three different aspects of violence against women;

- domestic violence
- trafficking in women and
- violence against women in armed conflicts.

They have a number of features in common:

- the nature of violence is gender-based

- the victims are women and the perpetrators are men
- the violence is often sexual
- there is insufficient social, economic and political protection.

The first two aspects, domestic violence and trafficking in women, affect all OSCE States, whereas armed conflict affects most states only indirectly. Trafficking and violence against women in armed conflicts is an international crime and calls for cooperation between countries and international organizations.

Also, in terms of consequences there are some common denominators:

- the victims are often stigmatized, re-victimized and re-traumatized by the societies they find themselves in
- the victims lack effective access to support and assistance
- the violence bears heavy social, economic and security costs for the societies.

From the outset, I want to re-affirm that violence against women is in no way a private matter, and it can not be explained away as being determined by cultural and traditional factors, and therefore somehow allowed or at least unavoidable. The argument that a society “is not ready to grant women full enjoyment of their rights” would be most disturbing and a fundamental misunderstanding of the problem. Instead, it has to be recognized that violence against women has severe implications for the society. Let me briefly refer to some of them:

Economically: direct costs include medical costs and those of police, prisons, the criminal justice system, housing and social services. Non-monetary costs

include increased mortality due to homicide and suicide, depression and other psychiatric disorders. To this costs should also be added decreased labour market participation and reduced productivity. Reducing gender-based violence will free up resources to tackle other pressing social problems.

Socially: Violence against women creates an atmosphere of fear in society. It is well documented that a violent upbringing tends to start a cycle of violence for many children, both as victims and perpetrators.

Democratically: Violence against women is a major obstacle for their participation in public and political life. A woman who is abused at home is less likely to participate in elections or other activities in the public sphere.

The OSCE is a security organization. Its definition of human security has always included a human rights perspective. We therefore see violence against women from a security perspective, as a human security issue. On the individual level this means that all people have the right to live without fear and that each individual should have opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potential. On the State level, the corresponding obligation, under international law as well as under OSCE commitments of a political nature, lies in guaranteeing the effective exercise of these rights by everyone.

Research has shown that violent conflict tends to be more common in countries which limit women's decision-making power, characterize women as inferior to men and accept domestic violence as a norm. It must be recognized that the main cause of gender-based violence is gender inequality and any effort to reduce gender-based violence must address gender inequality. Utilizing the

knowledge and expertise of women and strengthening the role of women in society should be seen as a peace-promoting and conflict-preventing activity. In other words: enhancing gender equality is an important tool for conflict prevention.

However, it has to be added that even in societies where gender equality is most advanced, violence against women - in particular domestic violence – is far from eradicated. This problem exists in every participating State of the OSCE. Having said that, let me stress that violence against women must not be accepted as a fact of life. Experience shows that it can be tackled.

Action by governments, supported by NGOs, media and international organisations, does matter and can effectively change things. This conference should therefore focus on the practical level, on action that can be taken by the individual State and the support that can be given by international organizations.

There is a need for fully recognizing the gender aspect in early-warning systems and post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation, both by the OSCE field missions and by institutions such as my own. In particular, indicators of gender inequality and violence against women could be elaborated and used in a more systematic way.

In an early warning system, an increase in domestic violence can indicate an increased level of violent tendencies and therefore an escalation of a conflict in the society. It was for example reported that 44 per cent of women in Kosovo experienced domestic violence for the first time in 1998 or 1999. This co-

incided with an escalation of the armed conflict which blew up in the in the spring of 1999.

Violence against women increases during a conflict, which even can manifest itself in the use of rape as a tool a war. This mirrors the escalation of violence behind the closed doors of the home.

The end of an armed conflict may signify an end of open fighting, but for women the post-conflict situation can mean an increase of violence:

- War is often followed by a wave of domestic violence when men act out war traumas they have not been able to heal.
- Women who have survived sexual abuse during a conflict now risk violence by their own community who blame women for the shame they have brought on their families. Young girls that become pregnant are thrown out by their families. Wives are killed by husbands.
- Increased international presence, by humanitarian aid workers and peacekeepers, is often followed by an increase in trafficking of women for sexual exploitation.

We at ODIHR believe that violence against women has to be tackled from several angles. We are therefore now focusing on this in terms of human rights, democratization and institution-building, minority and discrimination.

I hope that the discussions here will identify areas where the OSCE and the ODIHR can play a facilitating role. I hope we will identify over these two days where awareness of violence against women can be factored into the work that

is already ongoing, and where the OSCE, both from its security and its human dimension perspective, is in a position to make a difference.

The OSCE has recently strengthened its focus on these issues: it has revised its Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, and it has adopted, in 2003, an Action Plan for the fight against trafficking in human beings. As of yet, we are missing a Permanent Council Decision, or better a Ministerial Decision, which addresses violence against women in a concrete and action-oriented manner. It is therefore my hope that this Workshop, together with the upcoming Vienna Seminar on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in June, will result in increased awareness at the political level. It is time for a Ministerial Decision which recognizes violence against women as a threat to security, of the individual as well as of the State, and strengthen the resolve to use all OSCE instruments for developing proper responses.

Elements for such a decision should include the following: an agreement on a zero-tolerance policy, including criminalization and effective punishment of the perpetrators; state policy and practice which are victim-friendly and ensure accessible and effective support to the victims; and effectively addressing the root causes. The work of our organization with regard to trafficking in human beings - from the Action Plan to the development of national referral mechanisms – already represents a good ground work in this regard.

Another avenue to increase the attention given to violence against women, which may seem obvious, is to include violence against women in reporting of OSCE field presences. It is not uncommon to find current reports on violence in societies without any reference to violence against women.

We will also need to include work with regard to benchmarks. In the case of domestic violence benchmarks could help to measure actual progress made States as well as being used in international exchanges of good practices and successful strategies.

The OSCE and its member states should also strengthen their effort to recruit more women to higher positions in the Organization. There is currently not a single female Head of Mission and there are no women in the Panel of Eminent Person which was established to propose reforms in the OSCE. We as an organization are setting a poor example for others by not promoting women to our most prominent posts – and we are not proving to be particularly gender-sensitive as long as this remains the case.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that while men's violence against women is the responsibility of men, gender equality is the responsibility of both women and men. I was therefore quite surprised to see the over-representation of women in the participants' list to this conference. We have to involve more men in these areas, as we have involved more women in our general activities.

There is an obvious risk that at a conference which focuses on violence against women, women will be seen only as victims. However, even though violence against women can be seen as one of the major obstacles against women's empowerment and full participation in society, history is full of examples of women who have done amazing things despite being victims of violence. In this spirit, I wish you *bon courage* for the up-coming two days and I look forward to



hear about the results, which I can promise that we will at least make the best use of by my Institution, the ODIHR.

Thank you!