



**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MIROSLAVA BEHAM,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SERBIA TO THE OSCE,
ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY
UNDER CURRENT ISSUES
AT THE 853rd MEETING OF
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

10 March 2011

Mr. Chairperson,

My delegation is pleased that the issue of the International Women's Day, a day of global celebration of women, is raised at this meeting of the Permanent Council. As we know, in some countries of the OSCE region the International Women's Day serves as an occasion to pay respect to and show one's appreciation towards women in a more ceremonial way. In other countries of the OSCE space this is the day of many declarations, appeals and actions related to women's rights and the situation of women in society. In Serbia, where the International Women's Day was marked in 1914 for the first time, we have a combination of the two approaches – flowers and chocolate on the one hand, and statements and activities on the other.

I may say that both approaches are well-intentioned gestures of tribute to women, but they share one common deficiency – they are unfortunately limited more or less to one day out of 365 days of the year. Even a hundred years after the first International Women's Day was celebrated, it is still difficult to get certain issues related to women's rights or to gender equality on the public and political agenda beyond 8th of March. Even a hundred years after women – and by the way, many men, as well – started struggling for gender equality, we are faced with inequality. Let's take the wage gap. According to Council of Europe data, in the private sector in Serbia, highly qualified men still earn 17.8 % more than equally qualified women, which is an average figure for European Union countries, as well. This means that highly qualified women work each year until the 5th of March unpaid. The wage gap becomes even larger when it comes to lower salaries and less qualified jobs.

There are other, even more striking data on gender inequality, discrimination or violence against women, and in fact, they should be all well known or are at least easily accessible in the age of the World Wide Web. One of the challenges that

continue to prevail is how to translate findings and knowledge into action, and to do that on every day of the year.

Let me at this point, Mr. Chairperson, turn to our organization. We noted with appreciation the letter issued by the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on Gender Issues, Ms Wendy Patten, on 8th of March, which, in fact gives a proper, short overview of where we stand and where we have to go in the matter of gender equality – as participating States and as an organization. Let me just single out one figure that should make us think: Three female Heads of Mission out of 112 in almost two decades of OSCE field presences constitutes, to put it mildly, a real problem. It is hard to find many good reasons to favour a qualified man over an equally qualified woman, if there is an obvious gender-imbalance – provided that participating States nominate female candidates at all, of course.

The same applies to the senior management of the organization. In order to ensure a gender balanced selection process, we believe that the interview panels should be composed of men and women likewise – irrespective of the gender of the candidate.

As an organization dealing with security, the issue of gender and conflict and the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 should be one of our top priorities. It is proven that in conflicts women are the most affected, but they are also the most active when it comes to peace-building and reconciliation. One should not underestimate certain mediation and social skills that are ascribed to women in general and can be effective in conflict resolution.

Mr. Chairperson,

As Wendy Patten wrote in her letter, there has been progress in the OSCE in recent years in improving gender equality, but still the implementation of the OSCE Gender Action Plan remains a cause of concern. The recent official launch of UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, should be an incentive for the OSCE, for us all, as well. In this sense, we are looking forward to discuss gender related issues in-depth in the OSCE on many more occasions between today and the next 8th of March. In the end, we believe that there is a common understanding that gender equality is a matter of dignity of women *and* men alike.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.