



**Meeting of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation
on UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security**

**Statement by Ms. Ashkhen Savtalyan, Senior Lieutenant,
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on

Full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the defence sector in Armenia: achievements, challenges, and opportunities

Mr. Chairman,

Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to participate in this discussion at the Forum for Security Co-operation and to present the approaches of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Armenia on the issue of full, equal and meaningful involvement of women in the Armed Forces and the efforts undertaken in this regard. Thank you for such an opportunity.

As the Forum provides a platform where we can share our experiences and raise our concerns, I would like to take a look with you at the path that Armenia has taken in terms of involving women in the defence sector, present our achievements, and, why not, talk about the challenges we face along the way.

Twenty-one years ago, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The resolution underlined the importance of special needs of women and their equal participation and full involvement to maintain and promote peace and security. However, despite the efforts of the international community women continue to face violence and discrimination in many parts of the world. Moreover, the involvement of women in decision-making processes on security issues and peace negotiations remains unacceptably low.

The Republic of Armenia has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the promotion and implementation of women, peace, and security agenda at the domestic level. To this end the National Action Plan, which was adopted by the Armenian Government in 2019, is an important tool for us to implement the provisions of the Resolution. Preceding the

NAP development, Armenia had already taken significant actions in this direction, both through state institutions and non-governmental organizations. Anyway, the adoption of the NAP has enabled more systematic, holistic and targeted actions with more effective and visible outcomes.

One of the main goals of the National Action Plan is to promote the involvement of women in the Armed Forces and to provide them with equal opportunities. The Ministry of Defence is primarily responsible for fulfilling this commitment.

If we look back at the work done to implement this agenda, we should start from the year 2014, when there was a revision and transformation of the approaches and policy regarding women's involvement in the Armed Forces. ***I would like to emphasize that the full realization of the potential of women in the Armed Forces continues to be seen as a crucial component of the Armed Forces reform process.***

Defence leadership has gradually strengthened the approach that the full use of women's potential in the Armed Forces can lead to significant changes, as the only unit of measurement of human potential is the added value he or she brings to the army. It is professionalism that matters.

I will not reveal a secret if I say that Armenia has a small population as well as security problems that incomparably exceed it. In these conditions, for us, the full realisation of women's potential in defence sector is also a matter of security.

So, what are the goals we want to achieve in terms of women's involvement in the Armed Forces? We have set three main targets:

1. First to expand the involvement of women in the defence sector. We strive to increase the number of female service people. This goal is also enshrined in the 2018-2024 Modernization Program of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia. The National Strategy for Human Rights Protection for 2020-2022 also states the promotion of women's involvement in the Armed Forces as one of the main activities.

2. Second to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women to receive professional military education, pursue a military career, and get promoted. Every single service member of the Armenian Armed Forces, whether a woman or a man, should have the confidence that the Army's promotion system is meritocratic. He or she must acknowledge that the only way to the highest ranks is through knowledge and professionalism.

3. Third to promote women's participation in decision-making and policy development processes. This means creating an environment where the potential of female military personnel can be fully realized, where female service members will not be just the executors of the already-made decisions, but active participants in making those decisions.

Now I would like to reflect on the measures that we have taken to get closer to these targets. The first and most important step we took was to review the legislation. As a result, we have eliminated all legal barriers to the involvement and promotion of women in the Armed Forces. Just as a reminder, I would like to note that in 2013 Armenia adopted the "Law on ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for Women and Men". It stipulated that, as in other spheres of public life, the state should create equal opportunities for men and women to participate in state governance/ public administration.

It is a fact that at present legal guarantees are provided for men and women to receive military professional education, to pursue a military career, and to have equal opportunities for promotion. My own example gives me the right to make such a claim. After graduating from a civil university, having a master's degree in political science, I applied for military service in 2019, passed a relevant qualification exam, and after passing a probationary period, I joined the Armed Forces. And last month, I had my first promotion, receiving another senior lieutenant rank.

Let me give you some figures on the involvement of women in the Armed Forces.

Women currently make up about 9% of the total number of contract military personnel in the Armed Forces. Moreover, compared to the previous year, this year the number of women in the officer corps has increased, which gives us hope to believe that this will lead to an increase in women's participation in decision-making in the future.

From the 2013-2014 academic year, the doors of the two military universities of the Ministry of Defence were opened to female cadets in all fields of specialization, from intelligence to artillery, from military aviation to the management of UAVs. We consider it a significant achievement that in 2019 and 2020 the number of female graduates of both military universities was 35% higher than in 2017 and 2018 taken together. Our female graduates continue their service in the Armed Forces in various positions, including as commanders of platoons.

Apart from the revision of the legislation, the existence of institutional mechanisms is of key importance for the protection of women's rights in the Armed Forces. The Human Rights and Integrity Building Center of the MoD has been operating since 2015, coordi-

nating the implementation of activities within the framework of 1325. In 2019, the Department for Work with Women was established in the General Staff of the Armed Forces, which is the first specialised subdivision dealing with female service members' issues.

I consider it necessary to highlight that the support of international partner organizations continues to be essential for the Ministry of Defence in the implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda. In particular, the issue of ensuring equal opportunities for women in the Armed Forces is at the core of the annual cooperation programs between the Ministry of Defence and UNFPA Armenia Country Office since 2014.

One of the important achievements of this co-operation was the establishment of a peacekeeping platoon consisting of female personnel in the Peacekeeping Brigade of the Ministry of Defence in 2017. Enlargement of women's involvement in peacekeeping missions is also one of the eighteen goals of the NAP.

Armenia is incorporating female peacekeepers into the peacekeeping brigade and is providing equal opportunities for training conducted both in Armenia and abroad. Since 2018, our female peacekeepers have been carrying out their mission successfully in Afghanistan (within "Resolute Support"), Kosovo (KFOR), and Lebanon (UNIFIL) within the Armenian contingent. In order to be eligible to fill staff officer and military observer positions in UN peacekeeping missions, Armenian female service members are encouraged to attend appropriate international professional courses.

We believe that education is the power to change public perceptions and to break stereotypes about women's military service, as well as to create a conducive environment for women's involvement in the Armed Forces. To this end, we pay great attention to education, training, and awareness campaigns. As an example of some successful measures, I would like to mention training for cadets and personnel of the Peacekeeping Brigade on the issue of gender-based violence against women in armed conflicts that are regularly provided in co-operation with UNFPA.

Last year, at the invitation of the Council of Europe, we hosted Judge Advocate General of the United Kingdom's Armed Forces His Honor Jeff Blackett, who shared his thoughts on the issue of sexual violence and gender-based violence in the Armed Forces and on preventive measures. This seminar was attended by female service members of different army units and subdivisions, including the peacekeeping brigade.

Modules related to women's rights, gender equality, and the prevention of gender-based violence have been included in the "Human Rights in the Armed Forces" subject's curriculum taught in the Military Educational Establishments since 2016.

Since 2019, the Council of Europe has been implementing a Project "Human rights and women in the Armed Forces in Armenia" in the framework of the Council of Europe 2019-2022 Action Plan for Armenia. The Project, along with others, is aimed at promoting full and effective equality for women and men in the Armed Forces.

Within the framework of the program, an information campaign aimed at the involvement of women in the Armed Forces is effectively implemented. Animated videos about the opportunities to enter military service, enrollment to military universities, mechanisms for the protection of women's rights in the army have been filmed and disseminated on public platforms. Examples of successful campaigns are the Ministry of Defence's "How I Became a Peacekeeper" which reveals the motivations of women to become peacekeepers, as well as the "Set an example" awareness campaign, held by Armenia's Ombudsman office. The latter aims to break stereotypes about the role of women in society.

Research carried out by the Ministry of Defence deserve particular attention: they focus on the perceptions of women's military service by different segments of society and the role of female military service members. The results of the research are summarized in the book "Perspectives on the Extension of Women's Involvement and Participation in the Defence Sector". The Ministry of Defence also published the "Woman and the Army" book, which presented two important issues from sociological, military-civil, and socio-cultural perspectives: the involvement of women in the Armed Forces and women's participation in state defence.

The need assessment of female military personnel is held regularly. In the nearest future, within the framework of the Council of Europe's program, the MoD's General Department for Health, Social Protection and Veterans Affairs plan to conduct research on female service members, cadets, and veterans' specific healthcare needs and problems.

Despite the progress made in implementing the women, peace and security agenda, there are still several challenges that hinder the full involvement of women in the Armed Forces. For example, there is a prevailing stereotype in society that the army is a male-dominated environment, and therefore military service is designed for men. This stereotype is a real barrier to women's involvement.

Another stereotype concerns military positions that female service members can occupy. We conducted a survey on that issue among female cadets and male personnel of the army units last year. The question was "In what positions do you see female commissioned officers?" The answers differed cardinally, as expected. Female cadets saw themselves as future corps' or army units' commanders, or chiefs of staff, but their male colleagues thought that they best fit for financial officers, heads of medical or logistic services. Only

a few men saw women in commanding roles. The survey also showed that the academic progress of female cadets and their perceptions of military positions are broader than the limitations attributed to them.

I would also like to touch upon another challenge that the international community and national states face: it is violence, discrimination and hatred towards women and girls during armed conflicts and humanitarian crises. Cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment towards women, including female service members, POWs, and civilians still occurs in many conflict zones.

Failure of the international community to give a proper assessment to such manifestations forces the member states to reconsider their approaches to the full involvement of women in the Armed Forces. After all, women service members will be targeted during military operations. This issue is also raised in the subsequent UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security Agenda, that consider violence during hostilities a "weapon" and call on states to refrain from it.

In conclusion, I would like to note that despite the challenges that we face, more and more countries are developing National Action Plans on women, peace and security agenda. These states acknowledged the need to increase and promote women's representation and meaningful participation in defence and security sectors. What unites us around one agenda is the confidence that women's participation in peace and security decision-making leads to more sustainable peace and security outcomes.

Thank you! Looking forward to listening about other OSCE participating states' experiences on the implementation of women, peace and security agenda on the domestic level.