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**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT BY NORWAY IN RESPONSE TO THE SECRETARY
GENERAL'S PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2004 OSCE ACTION PLAN FOR
THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY**

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council
Vienna, 21 July 2016

Thank you, Mr Chairman,

Thank you, Secretary General, for your substantive report on an issue of great importance to our organisation and to each and every OSCE participating State, including those which may not yet have understood why it is important.

I also thank you Secretary General for linking the work of the OSCE to global efforts, as reflected in the adoption last year of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda as well as UN Security Council Resolution 2242 on Women, Peace and Security.

Mr Chairman,

We are making progress in promoting gender equality in many areas, but when dealing with issues of great importance good is not good enough.

We must be ambitious, both as individual countries and as an organisation.

That is why we must continue to work towards an update – a strengthening – of the 2004 Gender Action Plan. We were close to agreeing on an addendum to the plan at the Belgrade Ministerial last December. I call upon those who blocked the adoption of it to reconsider their position.

Mr Chairman,

I will be leaving the OSCE shortly and today is therefore my last chance to speak in the Permanent Council on the promotion of gender equality. I will use this opportunity to make two general points and one specific.

My first point is that almost all OSCE participating states have agreed to the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. In doing so, we acknowledge that discrimination against women violates their rights and their human dignity. We acknowledge that discrimination serves as an obstacle to the equal participation of women in the political, economic and social life of their countries.

Gender equality is a prerequisite for a free, fair and democratic society.

My second point is that the promotion of gender equality makes our economies stronger.

In the Global Gender Gap Report for 2015 issued by the World Economic Forum, the first four places are occupied by Nordic countries. The Nordic countries are stable and prosperous welfare societies.

Gender equality is not only about rights, but about doing the right things, about drawing on the creativity, experience and capacity of the whole population.

Let me give you a concrete example from my own country to illustrate how formidable the benefits of gender equality can be to a society. You have heard it before, but the example is so telling that you deserve to hear it again:

Chairman,

The labour force participation of Norwegian women has increased from 50 per cent in the 1970ies, to more than 75 per cent today. This is 16 percentage points above the OECD average. Crucially, to paraphrase former Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, if Norwegian women's labour participation was to drop to the OECD average, the value of the production loss would equal Norway's entire oil wealth.

The development of modern Norway would have been unthinkable without gender equality and women's participation in the workforce. Failure to empower women is bad economics.

Mr Chairman,

My third and final point is the following:

Three years ago, in June 2013, the Norwegian Parliament adopted legislation on gender neutral conscription, or universal conscription as we prefer to name it.

This legislation is not only about the *duty* of girls to serve in the armed forces, it is also about their *right* to do so.

These days many boys and girls are being drafted in for one year of military service. They enter an army that has harvested the first lessons of the legislation adopted in 2013. There are of course practical issues to be solved, but military leaders point out that an army with men and women serving side by side, give us a better and a stronger army. Personally I would add the following: An army in which men and women have the same duties and enjoy the same rights is an army more in harmony with the needs of a free, tolerant and democratic society.

Thank you Mr Chairman.