

Original: ENGLISH



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to June Zeitlin, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender Issues and to Ambassador Miroslava Beham, Senior Adviser on Gender Issues

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 6, 2014

Upon the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, participating States committed to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to gender. In Istanbul in 1999, we committed to make gender equality an integral part of our policies both as States and within this Organization. Today we heard from two leaders who have worked diligently to advance gender equality. Thank you both for your presentations and for the work you do every day to promote respect and equality.

Ambassador Beham, we were pleased to have hosted your brief visit to the State Department last week and pleased again to welcome you to the Permanent Council. We appreciate that your team, working closely with ODIHR and with Ms. Zeitlin, assists participating States by developing programs and resource materials to support implementation of their OSCE commitments related to gender. We also welcome your efforts to ensure that a gender perspective is integrated into all OSCE activities, including the SMM.

Ms. Zeitlin, thank you for your clear advocacy on behalf of gender equality in the OSCE region. Your dedication, as an unpaid volunteer, makes your comprehensive country visit reports – to nine participating States in three years – all the more remarkable. Your visit to Albania with the OSCE Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues highlighted the experience of women who confront multiple forms of discrimination. We commend Albania for its recent ratification of the Istanbul Convention and encourage the government to strengthen its efforts to mainstream gender issues and implement initiatives to address gender-related concerns raised by the Roma community. We were glad to hear that you received an invitation from Belarus, and we look forward to hearing about that country visit in due course as well. Your comments highlighted that the OSCE doesn't compare favorably to other international organizations in terms of our institutional set-up to deal with these issues. I think those are comments that deserve better reflections by the participating States – and indeed, you highlighted that there is more that we can do on follow-up and implementation.

Ms. Zeitlin, you also noted that the OSCE Secretariat itself can do better in finding ways to incorporate gender perspective and mainstreaming. To help accomplish these goals, we support elevating the position of the Senior Gender Advisor to the level of Director, which will provide enhanced leadership on the Organization's gender equality commitments and better ensure the integration of a gender perspective throughout all decision-making processes.

This year is the 10th anniversary of the 2004 Action Plan for Promoting Gender Equality. In July, a Gender Review Conference brought together participating States, OSCE executive structures, and civil society to take stock of the implementation of the Action Plan, and to examine best practices and areas for improvement. The discussions were revealing and we support holding this conference regularly.

We heard at the conference that while our approaches may differ, participating States are united in their desire to advance gender equality and combat gender-based violence. We also heard how women continue to lack equality in social, economic, and political realms.

The United States reiterates its pledge to fulfill its OSCE commitments on Gender Equality to promote the full and equal exercise by women of their human rights, including by supporting non-discriminatory legal and policy frameworks; working to prevent violence against women and girls; promoting equal opportunity for the participation of women in political and public life; encouraging women's participation to prevent and resolve conflicts and in peacebuilding; promoting equal opportunities for women in the economic sphere; and supporting girls' access to education, particularly among marginalized communities.

We encourage all participating States to increase their efforts to promote gender parity throughout the OSCE region. The United States invests in women and girls because we believe that gender equality is critical to a just society. We also believe that gender equality advances our shared goals of prosperity, stability, and peace. When women and girls are accorded full and equal rights and opportunities, countries are more secure, peaceful, and prosperous.

Ms. Zeitlin and Ambassador Beham, the United States thanks you, and I thank you, personally, for your work to combat gender discrimination in the OSCE region.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.