



**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY MR. FIEL VANTHEMSCHE, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BELGIUM TO THE OSCE**

**FSC/PC Joint Meeting on “Women, Peace and Security and the Conflict Cycle”  
Vienna, 8 March 2023**

While Belgium fully aligns with the statement made on behalf of the European Union, let me to add some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Firstly, I want to thank the different people at the head table: the FSC Chair Bosnia Herzegovina and the Chairperson in Office, North Macedonia, for dedicating today’s meeting to WPS; the panelists for their interesting and insightful interventions; the Secretary General for her relentless and personal dedication to this important topic. The Women, Peace and Security Agenda is a cornerstone of Belgium’s foreign policy. Only 5 months ago, Minister of foreign affairs Lahbib said in this very room that “Belgium is convinced that it is absolutely essential to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women at all levels of society and at all levels of decision-making, not least in the armed forces and in peacebuilding efforts.” This should not be a goal in itself, a “tick the box exercise”, but a means to ensure a more secure, more robust, more inclusive society, that takes the specific needs and situations of women and girls into account.

Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine shows that the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is more relevant than ever. Not only to protect victims, but also to empower women as agents of change, as defenders of their homeland and our values against an unjustified, illegal and unprovoked act of aggression. To quote the Ukrainian First Lady, Olena Zelenska, the Ukrainian resistance has taken a particular feminine face. Women help defend their homeland in the Ukrainian army, they keep the economy going, they seek help abroad. Unfortunately, women are also specifically impacted by the

war: they are forced to flee their homes, fall victim to sexual violence more often than men. Sexual violence is systematically being used as a weapon of war by Russia. To date, the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine recorded over 170 cases of sexual violence with mostly, but not only, women as victim. This is just the tip of the iceberg. These crimes cannot and will not go unpunished.

Chairs, colleagues, as the Code of Conduct on politico-military aspects of security clearly states in article 20, the democratic, political control of armed and security forces is an indispensable element of stability and security. The full, equal and meaningful participation of women in these decision making and oversight processes implies that women's participation in politics must be strengthened. As of January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, only 26,5% of all members of parliament globally are women, while only 22,8% of ministers worldwide are women. These numbers have to improve. That is why Minister Lahbib is hosting, as we speak, in Brussels, a high level event on Women Political Participation. Gender equality in political participation has intrinsic value, but instrumental value also plays an important role. The composition of legislative bodies affects the quality of laws and influences the extent of their application. While many initiatives have been taken and progress has been made, a lot of obstacles remain. Many individual women have overcome these obstacles - and actively participated and participate in political decision-making - but for women as a whole, the playing field needs to be leveled, opening opportunities for all. Removing persisting, maybe even new obstacles impeding the political participation of women, is what this event is about.

Chairs, colleagues, today's discussion once again shows that the OSCE continues to promote the full integration and implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. However, a lot remains to be done. We can and must do better. Building on the 2020 Tirana Ministerial Council Joint Statement on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which benefited an overwhelming support, Belgium is convinced that the sharing of data and best practices through the voluntary reporting on Women, Peace and Security under the Code of Conduct, remains highly relevant and beneficial to all.

I thank you

