



United States Mission to the OSCE

Keynote Remarks at the Security Dialogue “Women, Peace and Security: Integrating Gender Perspective when fulfilling the OSCE Politico-Military Commitments and Activities”

As delivered by Dr. Celeste Wallander,
U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
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Thank you so much, Chairperson Ignatiou, for hosting us today to discuss the importance of integrating gender perspectives when fulfilling military commitments and activities.

My name is Dr. Celeste Wallander. I am the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the U.S. Department of Defense, which is the lead Office of the Secretary of Defense for DoD’s policy on issues that relate to national and international organizations, including the OSCE, organizations in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

To begin my remarks today, I would like to start by framing implementation of the WPS agenda as both a moral and a strategic imperative for U.S. foreign policy and national security.

Research shows that the status of women and the stability of nations are inextricably linked: higher levels of equality make countries more prosperous, secure, and democratic; conversely, lower levels of gender equality result in greater instability, corruption, and conflict.

Approximately one of every six active duty servicemembers and one of every three DoD civilians is a woman. We still have a ways to go in the United States, but we have made extraordinary progress.

When we improve parental leave and expand childcare offerings at our installations; when we address mental, behavioral, and reproductive health; when we address sexual assault and harassment - we enable the meaningful participation of women in our Department, whose perspectives and experiences make us more competitive and improves our overall readiness as a joint force and as a Department.

The Department of Defense views WPS as a national security tool to build enduring advantages to advance our National Defense Strategy objectives. However, Women, Peace, and Security within the United States is a whole of government effort, which began with

President Obama issuing an Executive Order in 2011. This Executive Order established the first iteration of the U.S. National Action Plan for WPS.

Our Congress followed up with the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017. It is the first comprehensive legislation of its kind, which calls upon the U.S. to be a global leader in promoting the meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, management, resolution, and post conflict relief and recovery.

In 2019, the U.S. government then released its first whole-of-government strategy for WPS integration and implementation, and the Department of Defense subsequently developed a department-specific WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan.

Last October, the U.S. government released the updated 2023 WPS Strategy and National Action Plan, which is situated in the context of challenges and opportunities that unite us as a global community, including ongoing conflicts, migration and displacement, the climate crisis and environmental degradation, and increased gender-based violence.

Understanding and addressing the gendered dynamics of conflict will help the United States achieve and safeguard our national security priorities. When we institutionalize and invest in WPS initiatives through policies and programs, we invest in sustainable peace, international security, and economic stability.

The primary way the Department works on integrating a gender perspective is through its efforts on institutionalizing and operationalizing Women, Peace, and Security principles.

WPS strengthens the Department's collaboration and coordination with allies and partners; it builds resilience against competitors' coercive actions; and it enhances the design, development, readiness, and management of our people. Integrating a gender perspective is a key aspect of these efforts.

DoD has three ways of organizing WPS efforts. The first is how we develop and apply WPS principles like participation and protection within our own forces. The second is how gender perspectives can better inform DoD operations and increase effectiveness. And the third is working with partner nation defense sectors on how they incorporate WPS into their own workforces, operations, and activities.

Women, Peace, and Security provides the Department with a critical perspective on our operations and crisis response. A gendered perspective allows us to look at conflict and crisis more holistically and use that information to tailor our operations, activities, and security assistance more effectively within a conflict-affected space.

We see this with increased gender-based violence in civilian populations through human trafficking, conflict related sexual violence, and forced marriages, all of which impact the security environment we are operating within. Conflict and crisis are not gender neutral, therefore, planning our operations, guidance, and assistance must be gender responsive.

A key priority for the Department over this next year will be translating the 2023 U.S. Strategy into a plan that will guide DoD WPS implementation for the next four years.

We will codify roles and responsibilities for our gender advisory workforce and continue our WPS training and education efforts on conducting a gender analysis.

Integrating WPS into the broader DoD relationships with our partner nations will be a key aspect of our efforts towards the Partnerships Line of Effort of the U.S. government's WPS Strategy and National Action Plan.

DoD's work will continue with partner nations to expand opportunities for and remove barriers to recruitment, employment, retention, and promotion that contribute to the under-representation of women in foreign security forces; and reduce and prevent sexual harassment and other forms of violence that disproportionately impact women's participation in foreign security forces.

Finally, and importantly, WPS acknowledges the different impacts of conflict and crisis on women and girls. It advocates for their meaningful participation in peace and security decision making. Gender analysis is a tool that enables the Department to better understand these dynamics.

Today, as an example, the world is watching the importance of WPS play out in the war against Ukraine. Europe is not immune. The assault on Mariupol hospital, on pregnant women and newborn babies. The views of pensioners, who in Ukraine are disproportionately women, as they are displaced and cut off from life-saving social forces. These are effects of war that disproportionately harm and threaten women and girls.

In Ukraine, we have witnessed the devastating impacts of President Putin's war of choice on the Ukrainian people – from heightened trafficking and gender-based violence to the loss of livelihoods and rising poverty levels.

We know Ukrainian women and girls are experiencing these impacts in terrible ways with different long-term effects than their male counterparts. Women are affected, but women – I want to emphasize – are not helpless victims. Ukrainian women are actively defending their country. Their support ranges from actively serving in combat in uniform; to providing enabling and sustainment support for forward Ukrainian forces; to organizing local civilian volunteer groups.

WPS reminds us that conflict and crisis are not gender neutral and therefore, our defense toolkit must be gender-responsive.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak and I look forward to today's discussion and to working with all of you on this important agenda.

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