

Gender Conference

Combating violence against women in the OSCE region – bringing security home

Date: 22 July, 2016

Venue: Neuer Saal, Hofburg, Vienna

Concept Note

Background

The OSCE 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality lists preventing violence against women as one of the six priority areas for participating States to focus on in order to achieve equality between men and women. In particular, the Action Plan concentrates on the importance of:

- Promoting legislative initiatives and institution building;
- Addressing the effect of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons on violence against women;
- Improving the capacity to investigate sexual violence, trafficking and exploitation of women for propagating extreme ideologies, and;
- Combating negative gender stereotypes contributing to the persistence of violence against women.

The Action Plan was followed by Ministerial Council Decisions No. 15/05 and 07/14 on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women. Both decisions highlight violence against women and girls as one of the most serious and pervasive human rights violations and one of the main obstacles to their participation in all spheres of life. The decisions encourage participating States to address gender-based violence through legislation, supporting victims' access to justice, education of relevant institutions and ensuring that girl victims receive special consideration in terms of protection and assistance. Additionally, the 2014 decision refers to the importance of the signature and ratification of the Istanbul Convention¹.

During the Gender Review Conference in 2014, specific recommendations were adopted in the area of violence against women, including that the OSCE should enhance the exchange

¹ The convention has been signed as of July 2016 by 42 and ratified by 22 states, all of which are OSCE participating States.

of information, experiences and good practices among participating States across dimensions.

There is a need to expand the commitment on combating violence against women to clearly include the issue of sexual violence in conflict. This issue was addressed in the draft Addendum to the OSCE 2004 Gender Action Plan that was developed based on the recommendations from the 2014 Gender Review Conference. It includes reference to combating impunity of perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict and engage, as appropriate, in international efforts to combat and prevent sexual violence in conflict. Efforts need to encompass assistance to and protection of the victims of such violence, including by taking note of international best practices. One such international best practice and commitment is the Prevention of Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative, by the UK foreign office in 2014. The draft Addendum also includes the issue of engaging men and boys in combating violence against women.

While it is important to highlight the issue of gender-based violence in conflict, any comprehensive approach to combating violence needs to entail global commitments and efforts both in conflict and non-conflict settings.

Conference focus:

The OSCE Gender Section and the German Chairperson in Office will hold a conference in Vienna, Austria on 22nd July 2016, bringing together key stakeholders from government (policy makers and law enforcement agencies), international organizations, OSCE field operations, as well as civil society, to identify ways forward to combat gender-based violence in the OSCE region. The conference languages will be English and Russian with simultaneous interpretation.

Key objectives:

- Discuss progress made and achievements reached in the area of combating gender-based violence in the OSCE region, including during all stages of the conflict cycle
- Exchange good practices and lessons learned from government as well as civil society on combating gender-based violence
- Identify remaining gaps and areas where further efforts and commitments are required, including the possibility for an OSCE-wide action plan to combat violence against women

Conference format:

The conference will consist of plenary sessions in a panel format where progress, good practices and new approaches will be shared by the panel members, followed by an open discussion. The conference will start with a high-level opening panel, followed by two thematic sessions where speakers from government, international organizations, institutions and civil society organizations engage in an open discussion. *OSCE delegations are invited to raise questions of their concern and interest. This meeting does not envisage statements from OSCE delegations.*

Simultaneous interpretation for English and Russian will be provided throughout the conference.

Conference registration

All participants are kindly requested to fill in the attached registration form and send it to Elke Lidarik, Supervisor, Meetings Support and Documents Unit, e-mail: Elke.Lidarik@osce.org, no later than **15 July 2016**.

For further details about the conference, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Maaïke van Adrichem, Adviser on Gender Issues, Gender Section (e-mail: maaike.vanadrichem@osce.org, tel.: +431514366104).

For any administrative questions, please contact Ms. Martina Bonandini, Administrative Assistant, Gender Section (e-mail: martina.bonandini@osce.org, tel.: +431514366209).