



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE REPORT BY THE SPECIAL
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CHAIRPERSON-IN-OFFICE FOR GENDER
ISSUES**

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 12 December 2013

Thank you Mr Chairman,

I warmly welcome Ms June Zeitlin back to the Permanent Council and thank her for an excellent report.

The report highlights a number of important issues, not least violence against women. As Ms Zeitlin points out, this is an issue that affects women everywhere, regardless of geography, ethnicity or economic circumstance. And it is widespread. Therefore violence against women must remain an overarching concern in the OSCE's work relating to gender issues.

We also welcome the focus on the role of women in peace and security. It is our view that the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and the newly adopted subsequent resolutions are highly relevant to the OSCE.

Mr Chairman,

I would like to make two further points about the importance of gender equality.

Firstly, almost all OSCE participating states have agreed to the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

In so doing, we have committed ourselves to combat all acts of discrimination against women. The Convention acknowledges that discrimination against women violates the universal principles of rights and respect for human dignity, and serves as an obstacle to the equal participation of women in the political, economic and social life of their countries. Gender equality is in other words a prerequisite for a free, fair and democratic society.

In this respect we welcome Ms Zeitlin's emphasis on women's political participation, particularly the under-representation of women in government decision-making bodies. We note the positive developments that have taken place in a number of OSCE participating states, as highlighted in the report. But much still needs to be done, not least in many European Union countries. We acknowledge that women's participation in the Norwegian parliament should be improved, even though we have a government with an equal share of female and male ministers.

Ultimately, preventing women from realizing their full potential will only serve to hamper their ability to contribute in the service of their countries. In turn, a society will not be able to maximize its capacity for progress unless women are ensured equal opportunities. The reason for this is quite simple: women make up half of society.

Mr Chairman,

Lastly, I would like to give a concrete example from my own country to illustrate how formidable the benefits of gender equality can be to a society. 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.

In other words, the development of modern Norway would have been unthinkable without gender equality and women's participation in the workforce. Failure to empower women is, simply put, bad economics.

Thank you Mr Chairman.