



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 29, 2012

The United States joins the international community in marking the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence," which commenced on November 25.

Gender-based violence is a global pandemic that cuts across ethnic, racial, socio-economic, and religious lines, and knows no borders. Sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war. In humanitarian crises and emergencies, civilian women and children are often the most vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse because of their gender, age and status in society.

Violence against girls and women is, at root, a manifestation of the low status of women and girls around the world. Ending the violence requires elevating the status of women and girls and freeing their potential to be agents of change. We need to empower girls to speak up for themselves, and educate boys to speak up for their sisters. We must support the participation of men, boys, and critical community stakeholders – such as religious leaders – in addressing and preventing violence against women and changing gender attitudes.

This past August, the United States was proud to release its first-ever Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally. This strategy offers a whole-of-government approach to identify, coordinate, integrate and leverage U.S. efforts and resources around the world to better prevent and respond to gender-based violence. It complements our National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, launched December 2011, which identifies as a security priority the protection of women and girls, men and boys from gender-based violence. The United States has made gender equality and women's empowerment a core focus of our foreign policy and national security. Countries cannot progress when half their populations are marginalized and mistreated, and subjected to discrimination. When women and girls can live free from violence and are afforded equal opportunities in education, healthcare, employment and political participation, they lift up their families, their communities and their nations, and act as agents of change. As Secretary Clinton has stated, "Investing in the potential of the world's women and girls is one of the surest ways to achieve global economic progress, political stability, and greater prosperity for women – and men – the world over."

We support the OSCE's efforts to promote equal opportunity for women and girls, and to address gender-based violence. We commend ODIHR and the Gender Section for their tireless work to keep gender issues at the top of the OSCE agenda and in particular their commitment to leveraging the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Preventing and

responding to gender-based violence is a core element of this resolution. As a comprehensive regional security organization, the OSCE is the ideal forum to advance implementation of this resolution.

Therefore, we welcome the draft Ministerial Decision sponsored by Austria, Turkey, Finland, and Kazakhstan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and hope that consensus will be achieved in Dublin. We also commend the Irish Chairmanship for highlighting the instrumental role that the women of Northern Ireland played in the Peace Process – women like Monica McWilliams and Catherine Cooke are living examples of the power and purpose of UNSCR 1325. We have high expectations that the incoming Ukrainian Chairmanship will build further on these efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.