

Remarks for OSCE/UN Women Conference
Enhancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the Euro-Atlantic and
Eurasian Region
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Session 2. Best Practices and Lessons Learnt at National Levels
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Good afternoon. I want to thank the OSCE and UN Women for organizing this important conference and for helping to bring greater attention to the role of women in building peace and security. As a representative of the U.S. Department of State's Office of Global Women's Issues, I am honored to have this opportunity to join all of you distinguished panelists and guests gathered here in Almaty.

While the United States has long been committed to promoting gender equality and advancing the status of women and girls globally, the Obama Administration has made women's issues a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. In 2009, President Obama established the Office of Global Women's Issues to be led by an Ambassador-at-Large, who reports directly to the Secretary of State. In 2012, this position was institutionalized with a Presidential Memorandum signed by President Obama, making this a permanent office within the Department of State and we are grateful for the leadership of Ambassador Cathy Russell.

The United States recognizes that global stability, peace, and prosperity depend on protecting and advancing the rights of women and girls around the world. Numerous studies show evidence of a direct link between progress in women's employment, health, and education and greater economic growth and stronger societies. And when women's voices are fully-integrated into peace negotiations and security efforts, conflicts can be more often avoided and peace is longer-lasting. While women's issues have too often in the past been treated as "soft" issues or pushed off to the sidelines, the work of the Global Women's Issues office has been focused on fully integrating gender into all areas of diplomacy and development, and coordinating efforts across bureaus, agencies, and embassies to advance gender equality. This collaboration was critical to the development of the first ever U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security and in guiding our implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions. This comprehensive roadmap to accelerate and institutionalize efforts across the United States Government builds on the President's national security strategy, and was jointly developed by the Departments of State and Defense, USAID, and others with

guidance from the White House. It was followed by an implementation plan in August of 2012 and a new U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally. Each of these policies mark a change in the way we engage with our bilateral and multilateral partners on matters of international and foreign policy and how we work through our embassies and consulates across the globe. Given that issues of gender cut across much of the work that we do, we have taken a whole of government approach toward implementing the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security with a focus on five key objectives that are in line with UNSC Resolution 1325:

Objective 1: Institutionalize a Gendered Approach to Peace and Security

In order to foster a more gender-responsive approach to U.S. diplomatic and development work in conflict-affected areas, the Department of State has stepped up internal training, strengthened the way we track progress on gender integration, and made the advancement of women and girls part of the Department's official policy priorities and responsibilities. This effort has led to numerous changes, from the development of a training course for our diplomats; to the development of a "Guide to Gender in the Criminal Justice System" for practitioners in the field; to training staff responsible for monitoring gender-based violence programs in humanitarian crisis situations to be better sensitized and prepared to identify and prevent sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse; to institutionalizing and mainstreaming gender throughout our bureaus by creating gender policies and guidelines.

Objective 2: Promote Women's Participation in Peace Processes and Decision-Making

The prospects for achieving inclusive, just, and sustainable peace depend on promoting and strengthening women's rights and effective leadership. They also depend on ensuring that more women are effectively engaged in peace negotiations, security initiatives, conflict prevention, transition, and reintegration and reconciliation processes. U.S. efforts have included, for example, advocacy for the active participation of women in the peace process in Afghanistan, including through the High Peace Council and Provincial Peace Councils. In all high-level international conferences regarding the future security and economic development of Afghanistan, we have advocated for Afghan women's participation in the dialogues.

In other countries also affected by conflict, we have provided targeted support-- to encourage women's engagement in local peace and reconciliation processes and in broader regional peacebuilding initiatives, for example in Sudan and South Sudan.

We have supported women's political gains in countries in transition, from Egypt to Tunisia to Iraq. The State Department also has a Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society as a platform to work with and support civil society organizations worldwide which includes Women's Empowerment Working Groups—both in Washington and at many embassies around the world—to promote women's political and economic inclusion.

Objective 3: Strengthen Protection of Women and Children from Violence

The United States is committed to strengthening the protection of women and children from harm, exploitation, discrimination and abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking in persons, and stepping up efforts to prevent such violence. In a crisis or emergency situation, when governments, systems, and families are torn apart, refugees- especially women and girls, but also boys and men- become particularly susceptible to gender-based violence. Recognizing this, Secretary Kerry formally launched a new \$10 million initiative at UNGA. The purpose of the initiative, *Safe from the Start*, is to assess and address the reasons we still see huge gaps in responding to the needs of women and girls in emergencies, right at the very onset of an emergency. Our goal is to permanently transform the humanitarian architecture so that women and girls are never needlessly at risk and that survivors receive appropriate care -- not as an afterthought but as standard practice. Across the Department, we are strengthening our programming and improving our coordination to more effectively prevent sexual violence, hold perpetrators accountable, and ensure that survivors have access to the holistic services they need to recover and reintegrate into society, including access to sexual, reproductive and mental health services. Toward these ends, in April, we committed \$10 million in support of the goals of the G8 *Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative*.

Objective 4: Promote Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention

Recognizing the influential role women can play in society as peace builders; the United States promotes the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution. We believe that expanding opportunities for women and girls will correlate not only to positive outcomes in achieving peace and prosperity, but will also play a role in preventing conflicts. We've made advancing women's economic participation, including through leveraging public-private partnerships, a priority, particularly in conflict affected countries. For example through the *Women's Entrepreneurship in the Americas Initiative* (WEAmericas), the *African Women's Entrepreneurship Program* (AWEP), the *Central Asia and Afghanistan Women's Economic Symposium* (WES); the *South Asian Women's Entrepreneurship Summit* (SAWES); and the Invest for the Future Initiative targeting women in Southern and

Eastern Europe and Eurasia, we are helping women unleash their economic potential and empowering them to contribute to the economic, political, and civic development of their nations. Women represent an enormous, under-utilized resource in the struggle against violent extremism. The U.S. Female Engagement Teams discovered this in Afghanistan and Iraq and learned that women had a valuable pulse of the community and were often voices of moderation.

In Central Asia, the Department of State is providing regional and country specific follow-on economic support, which is helping to increase economic, educational, and political participation by women and strengthen new voluntary networks and organizations focused on advancing women's economic and political empowerment.

- In addition to direct support to hundreds of women entrepreneurs, 17 new women's business training centers were established across Central Asia, with four providing services across borders. Cross-border textile trade projects were launched to link value chains across the region into global fashion markets using a sustainable, International Trade Centre business model.
- The President of the Association of Women Entrepreneurs who received WES women's political participation training in Kazakhstan was subsequently elected to parliament and the level of women competing for office rose from 24 to 31% (36% of whom were elected) in 3 regions covered by a WES project.

Objective 5: Addressing the Needs of Women and Children in Relief and Recovery

The United States is committed to responding to the needs of women and children in conflict-affected disasters and crises, including by providing safe and equitable access to humanitarian assistance. When developing crisis response and programming, we aim to incorporate special protection considerations for the most vulnerable, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community. Bureaus and embassies aim to ensure that the Department's crisis response and recovery teams have access to appropriate gender expertise, such as pre-deployment training and a designated gender advisor to ensure that gender considerations are factored into U.S. Government-supported relief and recovery efforts.

I've provided an overview of the framework of the U.S. implementation of our National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, but have really only

scratched the surface. The United States is taking a multidimensional approach in addressing the many challenges of 1325 implementation. Probably the biggest lesson learned, is that we must all work in partnership to effect meaningful and lasting change. We will continue to work with governments, civil society, the private sector, and with international organizations to continue this vital work. The United States supports continued engagement on Women, Peace, and Security at the OSCE. When women become equal partners in all aspects of peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution, the world will be a better, safer, more just world, and the lives of all people--women and men, girls as well as boys, will be vastly improved.

Thank you.

