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## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Closing Statement at the 29<sup>th</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum Preparatory Meeting**

As delivered by Bahram Rajaei, Political Officer  
June 11, 2021

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to extend my appreciation to the impressively wide range of speakers we have heard from over the past two days, who have shared their perspectives and insights on different aspects of the Forum's theme of *Women's Economic Empowerment*. There is no doubt that the specific policy issues and potential solutions discussed during the four panel sessions will inform our deliberations in the Second Dimension going forward.

Focusing on the specific policy challenges and solutions offers us the best way to crystallize what we collectively think the OSCE can do to address the Chair-in-Office's priority. Several clear points of convergence seem promising from our view, were raised by multiple speakers in different sessions, and deserve further consideration.

These include focusing on the critical value and impact of care work to build resilience in the face of economic shocks like the pandemic, and the positive multiplier effect of closing the digital divide between men and women to ensure greater equality and women's access to support and resources during the economic recovery. Moreover, as we also heard on several occasions, the need to better use and share disaggregated data to promote women's entrepreneurship and role in trade and transport is a tangible gap in our current ability to better understand the challenge we face. Finally, several panelists and delegations—including the 26-member *Group of Friends on the Environment*—have highlighted how climate change disproportionately affects women and girls given their over-representation

in economic sectors that are more vulnerable to such disruptions. These areas are also related to the equally persistent challenges of the gender pay gap, lack of sufficient women's representation in meaningful decision making, violence against women, and barriers to women in the STEM fields.

Madam Chair,

Ten years ago, we undertook in the *Vilnius Decision on Promoting Equal Opportunity for Women in the Economic Sphere* to “Collect and analyse data to identify and address obstacles preventing women from fulfilling their potential in the economic sphere” and “initiate or strengthen policy and legal measures...to facilitate and protect equal opportunity for participation of women in the labour market” among other commitments. However, this decision did not contain any specific taskings for Executive Structures, the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, nor the OSCE Field Operations, to support these commitments. This is yet another area we could consider this year to clarify and more fully support the organization's capacity to advance these priorities. As our economies recover from the devastation wrought by the pandemic, putting the OSCE in the position to be more helpful to participating States is a critical step.

The United States will do its part to engage in a serious and comprehensive dialogue with other delegations on these and related matters as we move further along in the process of collectively considering which elements could form the basis of consensus ahead of the Ministerial Council meeting in December. We look forward to the opportunity to add to the discussions we have had here and in February at the third and final meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum in Prague in September. We applaud the Swedish Chair-in-Office's focus on these issues.

In closing, let me again express our sincere gratitude to the organizers of this week's events for your work.

Thank you, Madam Chair.