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## United States Mission to the OSCE

# **Response to the Presentation of the Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the OSCE Gender Action Plan**

As delivered by Acting Political Counselor Lane Darnell Bahl  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
July 23, 2020

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ambassador Yrjölä, for this year's comprehensive report on gender equality in the OSCE area. We appreciate your three-year overview and honest assessment, as it helps us take stock of achievements and gaps in gender equality ahead of the Gender Equality Review Conference in the autumn.

This year we are celebrating several milestones, as my EU colleague noted, in terms of gender equality. It is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*, and the 15<sup>th</sup> year of implementation of the *OSCE Gender Action Plan*.

Collectively, the international community has recognized the importance of gender equality as a cornerstone of peace, security, and economic development. We have made great strides, particularly in the OSCE region. Yet, inequality persists. In many countries, including in the OSCE area, women are not able to reach their full potential and societies are not able to benefit fully from women's political and economic participation. We are just beginning to see the repercussions of the CoViD-19 pandemic for gender equality. In some cases, measures designed to protect public health unintentionally led to greater violence against women. Women appear disproportionately affected by the pandemic for a variety of reasons as was mentioned: in some countries because they make up a larger share of the "essential" workforce, leaving them at higher risk of contracting the disease; or because they have lost their jobs at rates much higher than men; or because shelter-in-place conditions make them more vulnerable to domestic violence. As economies struggle to recover, policy-makers must ensure women and men are equally able to shape, access, and benefit from support programs.

The United States is committed to promoting gender equality at home and abroad. In 2019, we launched the *Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative*, the first whole-of-government effort to advance women's economic empowerment, with a goal of reaching 50 million women in the developing world by 2025. President Trump explained, "the initiative recognizes that societies that empower women to participate fully in civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful." On June 11, the State Department released its *Plan to Implement the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security*. Our *Strategy* is a fundamental component of the overall U.S. National Security Strategy and focuses on increasing women's

participation in political, civic, and security endeavors to prevent and resolve conflicts and create the conditions for long-term peace around the world. It aims to ensure women are no longer absent from, or overlooked at, the negotiating table, and it modernizes international programs to improve equality for and the empowerment of women. The OSCE has a key role to play. We note the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's June report on the gendered impacts of the CoViD-19 pandemic and the July report by ODIHR on the *State Responses to the CoVid-19 Pandemic*, which highlights how women are at greater risk of domestic violence and economic insecurity. The OSCE-led survey on the safety and well-being of women in Southeastern and Eastern Europe is a landmark instrument that illustrates substantive OSCE contributions to policy-making through providing comparable data on violence against women. ODIHR's *Umbrella* app shows the creativity this organization can bring to addressing pernicious inequalities with new tools. OSCE field operations play an important role helping host countries improve gender equality through the promotion of women's political participation in elections and developing their ability to influence public debate through freely exercising their views.

The United States encourages the Office of the Secretary General to continue advocating for gender parity across the organization. We welcome the management measures undertaken to address the results of the *Safe Spaces Survey* on sexual harassment. The zero-tolerance policy; training on gender sensitivity and unconscious bias; establishment of networks of gender focal points; introduction of special measures for the security of female staff members; and updating the internal justice system are good starting points. It would be useful to receive an assessment of the impact of these and other measures, including at OSCE field missions. Such an assessment could indicate whether, for example, the actions taken have changed attitudes or improved the work environment. These measures should encompass not only regular OSCE staff here and in the field, but also short-term mission members, including election observers.

We, the participating States, must act to meet our gender equality-related goals. We urge all delegations to nominate highly qualified female candidates for positions at the OSCE. Countries should encourage women to enter their diplomatic corps, which will have important downstream effects in international organizations as well. We welcome steps to improve equal opportunity and gender balance in hiring at the OSCE. The OSCE needs to make this organization welcoming, a safe place to work through a zero-tolerance policy on harassment, including sexual harassment, and policies to combat gender discrimination and provide equal opportunities for advancement.

Thank you again, Ambassador Yrjölä for highlighting the important work that remains. Together, we can improve gender equality at the OSCE and throughout the OSCE region, and thereby create more peaceful, stable, and secure societies.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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