

Closing remarks delivered by Ambassador Eberhard Pohl

Gender Conference

**Combating violence against women in the OSCE region – bringing security
home**

Date: 22 July, 2016,

Vienna

This has been, in many aspects, a very impressive conference.

Today, we once more recognized that violence against women, in particular sexual violence, is still a pervasive issue in the OSCE region. But this day also demonstrated positive developments: The discussions today addressed and identified progress, and there have been some examples that can indeed serve as best practices for many participating States. Moreover, the conference once again demonstrated the will of the participating States give high priority to tackling violence against women in order to overcome it. Peace, prosperity and democracy in the OSCE region can only be achieved and improved when all inhabitants can exercise their rights equally and freely.

Today we discussed persisting problems and remaining gaps in several areas:

For example, we discussed how states can improve legislation to strengthen the protection of women, or how authorities can increase their capacities to investigate and prosecute crimes. Swift and just prosecution of perpetrators are essential steps to establish long-lasting solutions. We – the participating

States - need to criminalize those atrocious actions, and we need to tackle the problem of impunity of perpetrators. This applies even more to the crimes committed while taking advantage of circumstances of armed conflicts.

On another track, societies should reaffirm their stand against violence against women to prevent crimes. Combatting negative stereotypes against women as well as raising awareness and acknowledgement of gender-based violence are essential preconditions to overcome it. These measures can help to reduce fear and to create opportunities for women to freely participate in the society.

We explored to some extent the root causes of violence against women. The participants also took the opportunity to look into the role of men and boys and their engagement as one of the innovative approaches that might be needed.

One finding is more than evident: Consistent efforts are needed to combat this persistent issue in the OSCE area.

Today's discussions showed various options and ways forward. Specifically, the discussions showed that funding and especially long-term funding is essential for projects to be successful in the long run.

As the Chairmanship, we see the necessity to further work and focus on the issue of violence against women, especially sexual violence, and including in conflict. We need to increase our collective efforts to abolish those heinous crimes.

We continue to strongly support the important work of the OSCE Gender Section and all stakeholders who work on this pressing issue. It is highly welcome that the Gender Section is intending to develop an "OSCE - wide

Action Plan on Combating Violence against Women". I think that today's conference has given valuable input for this work, and we are looking forward to an excellent source of information and a tool for implementation for the participating States. In order to send a strong signal, we should aspire to politically support this set of guidelines.

Once more, I would like to thank the OSCE gender section for organizing and guiding this conference,

to the speakers and moderators for your efforts,

and to all participants for showing interest, for engaging and enriching the discussions with your input.