



Vienna, 12 March 2020

Vienna

Statement by the Women Ambassadors of the OSCE, to the Permanent Council, on 12 March 2020 on the occasion of the International Women's Day.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the current Women Ambassadors and Representatives to the OSCE: Andorra, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Malta, Mongolia, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia and Sweden. (14 out of 57)

We commend the Albanian Chair for including International Women's Day on the agenda of today's meeting and for prioritizing the topic of gender equality throughout their Chairmanship.

We represent different countries of different sizes, from East to West and North to South of Vienna, all with our own national positions. Today we stand united in our call for gender equality and for inclusive security.

We stand together in our commitment to the OSCE core principles and values, as enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris and the Istanbul Document. Translating these commitments into action is not an easy task, but it is the foundation to accomplishing comprehensive security. Therefore, one of our main objectives continues to be making sure that the implementation of these commitments remains high on the agenda of the OSCE.

It is worth remembering that the Helsinki Final Act declares the importance for the participating States of the OSCE to cooperate with non-governmental organization, including woman organizations, thus recognizing already 45 years ago the importance of collective societal efforts in mobilizing populations for equality. Cross-dimensional mobilization is a key factor in reaching our long-term goal. It is our generation's duty to carry forward the

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work of the women and men who came before us, and to provide the generation that comes after with the best possible opportunities to continue our efforts in reaching equality, for all. This will be the purpose of the Generation Equality Forum convened by UN Women this year. As Women Ambassadors and Representatives to the OSCE, we are committed to be part of the Generation Equality and to make gender equality a reality.

Since Helsinki, we continue to build better and more inclusive structures, we have shattered glass ceilings, and we persist in challenging and limiting prejudicial gender stereotypes. Today, the OSCE serves as a reliable regional platform where civil society organizations, participating States, students, experts and researchers meet to share experiences, exchange ideas and have dialogues that contribute to realizing gender equality and to implementing our commitments thus leading to a higher level of security for all. This makes the organization a unique facilitator of knowledge that contributes to better policies and practices all over the OSCE region, and beyond.

Gender mainstreaming into the OSCE activities is an essential component of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. We strongly support the important work that the OSCE Gender Section and ODIHR do in this regard.

Inequality, discrimination, and sexual harassment are unfortunately still part of the reality in our organization. All of us are responsible for ending this and for ensuring that there are effective and reliable mechanisms to address such behaviors and create working environments conducive to gender equality. It is high time we treat these behaviors with a Zero Tolerance principle for the whole OSCE, beginning with its Secretariat.

As participating States, we need to keep working hard to show leadership in building equality and bridging gaps. Already at the Istanbul Summit 1999 the participating States stated the importance of establishing and implementing a Gender Action Plan. In 2004, an Action Plan was adopted but we regret that as of today it is not being fully implemented. In this regard, we welcome the holding of the third Gender Review Conference, that is scheduled for 29-30 June this year. This Conference will give both the Organization and the participating States an opportunity to take stock of the work that has been done, to assess where we have made progress, where we have stagnated, and where we have seen backsliding and deterioration. We will be able to explore how to more effectively implement our commitments in all three dimensions, and we look forward to working constructively together with all of you towards promoting gender equality as well as eliminating all forms of violence

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against women and girls, gender-based inequalities and discrimination against women and girls in the OSCE region.

Mr Chairperson,

Equality has the potential to offer solidarity and understanding in a world with increasing differences and polarization. The strive for equality belongs to all of us, not only to a country, a group or an organization. Gender equality, the inclusion and empowerment of women and girls is not and should not be cast as a “women’s issue”. Gender equality is a matter of human rights, democracy, and of social and economic development such as digital transformation. Making full use of women’s and girls’ potential makes a society stronger and more resilient, enabling an inclusive and comprehensive security, for all.

In 1875, Victor Hugo wrote “*Une moitié de l’espèce humaine est hors de l’égalité, il faut l’y faire rentrer. Ce sera là une des grandes gloires de notre grand siècle : donner pour contrepoids au droit de l’homme le droit de la femme*“
Let us all join forces now to realize women’s rights for an equal future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I would request to have this statement added to the journal of the day.