

Working session 9 Tolerance and non-discrimination I

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Working session 9 focused on the equality of opportunity for women and men, the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality as well as prevention of violence against women.

Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, director of the ODIHR highlighted in his introductory remarks the importance of gender equality as a fundamental aspect of a democratic society based on the rule of law. He underlined in particular the need to increase women's participation in the security sector as well as to make the security sector responsive to the needs of women. Ambassador Lenarčič stated the readiness of the ODIHR to continue to assist the participating states in this area, including in relation to national policies to implement the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1325 on Women, peace and security. Ambassador Lenarčič reaffirmed the commitment to combat violence against women and welcomed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention).

The Moderator, Professor Cees Flinterman, Honorary Professor of Human Rights and Member of the UN Human Rights Committee defined gender equality as a cornerstone of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. He noted that building on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a solid normative framework had been created at the international level. A particular reference was made to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Professor Flinterman underlined that there was still a lot to be done to achieve gender equality.

The Introducer, Ms June Zeitlin, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender Issues explained the priority areas in her work: the implementation of the UNSCR 1325, women's political participation, links between ethnicity and gender as well as combatting domestic violence and violence against women. She noted that while there were already a number of OSCE commitments in these areas, the need to integrate gender equality in all areas of the OSCE work was to be underscored. **The Introducer, Ambassador Miroslava Beham, OSCE Senior Advisor on Gender Issues**, provided an overview on the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. She noted that as the 1st dimension was lacking behind when it came to gender mainstreaming, the OSCE Gender Section had focused in 2012 on the UNSCR 1325. Ambassador Beham expressed hope that an OSCE wide action plan regarding UNSCR 1325 could be developed. Furthermore, she explained the plans for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the participating States as regards the implementation of gender-related commitments.

In the debate that followed it was widely stated that a lot still needed to be done to achieve gender equality. The importance of gender equality to the security and stability in the OSCE region was underscored.

Several participants stressed the need to improve the legislative framework as well as strengthen the implementation of legislation relating to gender equality in the participating States.

Many speakers highlighted the importance of combatting violence against women. A number of participants referred to the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention in this respect. Moreover, the need for public bodies to cooperate with civil society was stressed. A number of participants shared their best practices in combatting violence against women. One NGO highlighted the need to tackle violence against sex workers, as they were a group particularly vulnerable to violence. Furthermore, one NGO

stressed the importance to combat the practice of forced marriages.

Several participants underlined the need to enhance the participation of women in politics in all stages of the decision-making processes. A few delegations explained the encouraging results stemming from regulations establishing quotas for the lists of political parties in elections. Many delegations discussed the importance of economic rights related to gender equality. In this respect, especially the pay gap between women and men was mentioned as a major problem in participating States.

Several delegations made reference to their National Action Plans on implementing the UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security. A number of delegations expressed support to the development of an OSCE wide action plan on the UNSCR 1325. Several participants pointed out the need to pay attention to gender issues throughout the conflict cycle. One delegation presented the initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflicts.

Recommendations to the participating States:

To do their utmost to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women and girls, especially in the context of conflict.

To enhance the implementation of the commitments of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, peace and security, including adopting National Action Plans and developing an OSCE wide Action Plan.

To cooperate in building a global partnership to prevent sexual violence in conflicts.

To pay more attention to the issue of tackling violence against women and girls, particularly those that are most prevalent such as domestic violence. To sign and ratify the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. To ensure that especially vulnerable groups such as sex workers have access to effective protection from violence.

To enhance efforts to improve the participation of women in political and public life and in decision making at all levels, including introducing special measures to address discriminatory practices. Furthermore, to improve the sharing of information in this respect.

To tackle the issue of the pay gap between women and men.

To further involve men in gender equality promotion activities.

Recommendations to OSCE institutions, executive structures and field operations:

To mainstream gender issues in OSCE policies and activities, with a focus on the cross-dimensionality of gender issues.

To continue implementing and possibly renew the OSCE Action Plan for Promoting Gender Equality.

To continue providing assistance to participating States in matters related to gender equality.

To place women in key positions in field missions, institutions and the Secretariat.