

**REPUBLIC OF CROATIA****Statement by****Ms Maja Drmač****Division for Human Rights Regional International Organizations and Initiatives****Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs****OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting****Working Session 3: Tolerance and non-discrimination II*****Prevention of violence against women and children*****Warsaw, 24 September 2013**

Mr Moderator,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The human rights of women and girls are one of the priorities of the Croatian internal and external policy. Our Government works continuously on improving the record on gender equality and to create an environment devoid of gender-based violence.

Besides strengthening national laws and cooperation with the civil society, our Government has signed and ratified relevant international instruments and has been upholding relevant international initiatives.

Violence against women and girls has no borders or nationality. It occurs in all spheres of life and goes to often under-reported and under-punished. Particularly vulnerable are women and girls war victims of sexual violence, and special attention needs to be put on the protection of their human rights. Impunity for such acts of violence is still prevalent, and the prosecution rate very low. They need to be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators need to be brought to account, and it is therefore imperative for the International Criminal Court, as well as national courts, to be the last instance of justice for the victims and a reminder that there can be no tolerance for the crime of rape.

Recently, Croatia joined the network of champions against sexual violence in conflicts - wider global coalition initiated by the United Kingdom, working together to end sexual violence in conflict. Based on our own tragic experiences of the aggression to which Croatia was exposed at the beginning of the 1990's – during which rape was used as a method of intimidation and terror, we are convinced that solely by embracing the comprehensive approach we could adequately address the issue of sexual violence in conflict. In that regard, Croatian Government is currently engaged in designing a new comprehensive legislation to award the status of "civilian victim of war" to survivors of sexual violence from the war; providing psychosocial support and other assistance to survivors; assisting law enforcement in the prosecution of cases of wartime rape; and encouraging victims who remain silent to come forward for justice, recognition, and compensation.

One of the most important tools in backing up our advocacy efforts is education of both women and men on gender equality and unacceptability of any form of gender-based

violence. In that regard, Croatia is proud to have been appointed by the UN Secretary-General as a champion state of the UN Secretary-General's Global Initiative on Education. *Education First* calls for strong political leadership, sound policies and increased financing to help all children and young people benefit from a quality education. Croatia has focused its development cooperation efforts on education and economic empowerment of Afghan women and girls through school-building projects and small entrepreneurship projects.

Croatia has also made one of its priorities the *Equal Futures Partnership* international initiative (2012). The comprehensive National Action Plan for its implementation has been adopted in April 2013, with special emphasis on the implementation of the measures for combating gender-based violence against women as the main obstacle to the full participation of women in both politics and business, as well as on the empowerment of women from marginalized and the most vulnerable groups such as women victims of violence, members of ethnic minorities, particularly the Romani, women with disability, women immigrants and victims of trafficking in human beings.

Today we have the opportunity to discuss, deliver and act together to keep the momentum and accelerate progress towards elimination of all forms of gender-based violence. A cornerstone of our approach in combating gender-based violence should be based on the human rights protection and gender mainstreaming perspective. However, it is of utmost importance to continue improving a record at home in order to gain legitimacy for addressing the issue globally.

It is our common duty to keep in international focus the issue of gender equality, to advance the discussion on ways of achieving it and to influence the overall process of strengthening the rights and the role of women in our societies and worldwide. A respect of the human rights of women and girls should be inseparable part of our foreign activities and cooperation, both bilateral and multilateral.

Thank you.