



STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR MELANNE VERVEEER'S ADDRESS ON
THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 8 March 2018

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I thank the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on Gender Issues, Ambassador Melanne Vermeer, for her pointed and inspiring address. When it comes to gender equality, constant inspiration and reminding seem necessary.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank ambassador Vermeer for her significant contribution to the new global Women, Peace and Security Index that was presented in the Hofburg yesterday.

Every year on the International Women's Day several statements are made, often sharing some common topics: they celebrate the achievements made on gender equality over the past century, they note that more has to be done, and, in this forum, they point to areas where the OSCE could do more to ensure the fair and equal treatment of women. Recommendations often include the need to *mainstream* gender in all OSCE projects, to *ensure* that enough female candidates are recruited, to *increase* the participation of women in the OSCE's work on conflicts.

We agree with all of these points; after all, the first step to overcoming a challenge is to recognise it and look to areas for improvement. We must, nonetheless, ask ourselves not only *what* needs improvement, but also *how* these improvements are to be reached.

The International Women's Day is not only a celebration; it is a day to recognise the struggle women have endured to make equality part of the general political discourse. Recognising this, the responsibility for reaching equality lies with us, in this case the participating States. Only through our actions, aided as fit by OSCE Executive Structures, can we ensure gender equality. The imperative to act arises from more than the normative value of equality. Equality has practical value; it has utility.

There is evidence to support this conclusion: one example is the extensive social programs of Nordic countries providing affordable childcare and generous parental leave to make it possible for both mothers and fathers to participate and remain in the

labour market. These programs have proven beneficial for the economy: they increase the number of women engaging in paid work. This supplies the workforce with talent and resources that allow us to unleash the full economic potential of our populations.

As Norway, we will continue to engage on gender-related issues in the Permanent Council and decision-making structures of the OSCE, but more importantly, we will emphasise the gender perspectives of the OSCE's operational activities. Women's rights and gender equality are crosscutting issues in Norwegian foreign policy, and all Norwegian support to OSCE activities is contingent upon the appropriate integration of a gender perspective.

Gender mainstreaming is no quick fix, and the gender perspective does not solve all complex problems. However, gender equality takes us further towards peace and prosperity. Therefore, we must continue to stand up for equal opportunities for, and empowerment and participation of women and girls. In this respect, the International Women's Day is important, but it is only one day. Today we might celebrate, but what we do on the other 364 days of the year is what really matters.