



**Joint Statement**  
**by Ambassador Andrej Benedejčič**  
**Permanent Representative of Slovenia**  
**and Chairman of the OSCE MenEngage Network**  
**at the 1136th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**  
**on the occasion of the International Women's Day**  
**Vienna, 9 March 2017**

*Mr. Chairperson,*

I am addressing the Permanent Council in my capacity as Chair of the OSCE MenEngage Network. This network was launched at the OSCE in 2012 and seeks to raise awareness of the important influence men can have in ending gender-based violence and standing up against all kinds of inequality. I am therefore pleased to be also speaking on behalf of the United Kingdom, Sweden and Iceland as previous OSCE MenEngage Chairmanships, and of Austria, Finland, Kazakhstan and Turkey as the initiators of the OSCE-Wide Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. I am equally glad that this statement is supported by Albania, Andorra, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Montenegro, San Marino, Serbia, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United States of America, as well as the European Union and all its other Member States: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.

*Mr. Chairperson,*

Yesterday, we marked the International Women's Day. On this day in particular we should all reflect on the restrictions that women have faced in the past and the obstacles they continue to face to fully realize their rights. Gender equality is not yet a reality in any country in the world. International Women's Day therefore represents an opportunity to identify gaps in achieving this noble goal. At the same time, it also represents an occasion for us to reflect on the progress achieved and to think of the ways to advance it further.

It is for this reason that we would like to highlight the important role of men, both individually and collectively, in breaking the artificial barriers and glass ceilings that still confront women. Without their involvement, gender equality cannot be fully achieved. They can act not only as advocates for women's empowerment, but also as role models for other men, as well as boys. They can engage in overcoming traditional gender roles by championing equal fatherhood in family life and defeminizing work-life balance processes. In short, they can be important allies and agents of meaningful and mutually beneficial change in both the private and the public spheres.

Challenging existing social notions and stereotypes of masculinity, as well as norms, laws and practices that support them, is also an important step towards achieving gender equality. Being a man is often perceived as being "tough", but it should also mean being tough enough to stand up to and speak out against violence against women and girls. This needs to

be recognized for what it is: a human rights violation with high social and economic costs that affects us all. Women's economic empowerment, women's participation in the political sphere, as well as women's inclusion in peace- and security-related efforts, are some of the other areas where men's active support is critical.

*Mr. Chairperson,*

The International Women's Day also represents a welcome reminder that our Organization offers a perfect platform for the promotion of gender equality, which is a cross-cutting issue par excellence. We would therefore like to highlight the decision of the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship to mainstream the gender perspective into all of its activities this year. In this connection, we look forward to the holding of the Gender Equality Review Conference in June and call on all the participating States to take an active part in it.

Finally, this occasion is also an opportunity to recognize the important role that the OSCE executive structures have in promoting gender equality as an important prerequisite for comprehensive security, stability and prosperity. In particular, we would like to highlight the work of the Gender Section. Under the able leadership of the Senior Adviser on Gender Issues Ambassador Miroslava Beham it has already launched many important initiatives. One of them was to extend the global MenEngage Network to the OSCE five years ago. We would therefore like to use this opportunity to thank Ambassador Beham for this accomplishment and to assure her that this is one of those achievements of her time at the OSCE that will continue her work also in the future.

*Thank you.*