



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### Session 7

#### **Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including: Equality of opportunity for women and men; Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality**

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Ten years ago, we, the participating States, adopted the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, in which we “committed to making equality between men and women an integral part of our policies, both at the level of our States and within the Organization.” As we mark this tenth anniversary of the Action Plan, we should take a careful look at how we are doing in implementing our commitments.

While we have made progress in the past decade, we still need to do more. We all inherently share the same human rights and fundamental freedoms, which participating States must protect. Unfortunately, women are sometimes denied these rights solely because they are women. We must work harder to ensure that the human rights of women and men are respected equally and fully.

When women and girls are empowered, educated, and equipped to contribute to their societies, their families and countries are more likely to prosper, and be more stable and secure. However, women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty and discrimination globally. In many countries, women’s leadership and participation in politics, civil society, and the private sector continue to be hindered by lack of access to education, by discrimination, and by harassment in the workplace and elsewhere.

On September 22, Secretary of State John Kerry participated in the fifth high-level meeting of the Equal Futures Partnership during the UN General Assembly. He noted that 27 countries were now partner countries to the initiative, including 10 from the OSCE region. Access to quality education for girls on an equal basis is critical to ensure that women have the opportunity to succeed economically and to participate equally in political life, key objectives of the Equal Futures Partnership. This is important not just for individuals, but also for the economic success of whole societies. The OECD has found that the narrowing gap between male and female employment has accounted for a quarter of Europe’s annual GDP growth over the past two decades.

Workplaces must be free of discrimination and sexual harassment. Several OSCE participating States lack specific laws addressing sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace. These include **Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Russia, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan**, as well as **Kosovo**. In **Kyrgyzstan**, legislation prohibits physical assault, but

not verbal harassment. And even in countries where legislation exists, it is not always properly enforced.

It is also vital that women have an equal opportunity to participate in political life. We note ODIHR's study on gender equality in elected office and the new Handbook for Advancing Women's Role in Political Parties. Women's participation is important throughout the political process – not only as candidates, but during the campaign and administration of elections and as voters. The November 2013 presidential elections in **Tajikistan** marked a welcome increase in women's participation in the electoral administration, but we note that women were significantly underrepresented in electoral commissions at all levels. Family voting was widespread, often to the detriment of women voters.

Among OSCE participating States, which include some of the world's most economically developed countries, fewer than 25 percent of parliamentarians are female. Only seven out of 57 participating States have female Heads of Government. The United States admittedly performs poorly on these measures and we have much room for improvement. We all lose when women are excluded from power. Women bring valuable knowledge and skills from their societal roles and responsibilities. They often raise issues others have overlooked, and reach out to constituencies that others have ignored. Encouragingly, ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly reports indicate a positive trend toward increased female representation in many OSCE countries. This should continue.

Within the OSCE personnel system, significant progress has been made since the adoption of the Gender Action Plan in 2004. According to the Secretary General's annual report, gender balance in OSCE staffing has improved over the last ten years, although at the senior levels there is still much work to be done. In the history of the OSCE, only 8 of the 130 mission heads have been female. We are encouraged that in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, more than half of the Bureau members are women, and women now occupy seven of nine leadership positions in the three General Committees, including all three chairperson positions. We urge all participating States to ensure their recruiting strategies prioritize diversity and inclusion with respect to gender.

OSCE institutions and field presences are working to help participating States implement their commitments to ensure equality of opportunity between women and men, and we support these projects and programs. We would particularly like to note the important work being done by the Women's Resource Centers supported by the Offices in **Tajikistan**, **Armenia** and **Azerbaijan**. We believe that these could serve as models for other countries as well. We welcome the strengthening of the Gender Focal Points throughout the OSCE, and believe this should continue.

To close, we would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the work of OSCE Senior Adviser on Gender Issues, Ambassador Miroslava Beham, and of the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairmanship on Gender issues, June Zeitlin.