



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to the Report of June Zeitlin, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender Issues**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
December 12, 2013

All human beings have, and should enjoy, the same human rights and fundamental freedoms. Unfortunately, women are far too often prevented from enjoying these rights and freedoms. It is the mandate of the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender Issues, Ms. June Zeitlin, to encourage participating States to give priority to fulfilling their commitments regarding gender equality. Your presentation today is a reminder that we all must work harder to ensure the human rights and fundamental freedoms of both women and men are respected fully and equally. Thank you, Ms. Zeitlin, for your report today, for your work in 2013, and your future work in 2014 to promote gender equality.

As we approach 2014 and the anniversary of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for Promoting Gender Equality, we agree with you that the OSCE should focus on addressing violence against women, advancing women's political participation, and promoting the economic empowerment of women. We must also continue work that we have started on UNSCR 1325 on women, peace, and security.

Gender-based violence affects women in every participating State, as it does around the world. In Moscow in 1991, OSCE participating States committed to "seek to eliminate all forms of violence against women, including by ensuring adequate legal prohibitions against such acts and other appropriate measures." On the eve of 2014, however, several OSCE participating States still lack specific laws against domestic violence. Although some States do prosecute domestic violence under general assault laws, specific laws against domestic violence strengthen authorities' ability to hold perpetrators accountable and can take the onus of pressing charges off of the survivor.

While necessary, strong legislation is not enough. Not only must laws be properly developed and effectively implemented, there must also be an adequate network for victim assistance. Law enforcement authorities sometimes do not respond adequately to cases of physical or sexual assaults against women, particularly when perpetrated by spouses or other family members, and may even pressure a woman not to press charges. States must do more to support and train judges, law enforcement officials, social workers, and healthcare providers to respond to cases of domestic violence, sexual assault, rape, or other forms of violence. Survivors must be able to obtain information and assistance quickly and easily. This requires adequate resources, partnering with civil society, a community coordinated response, and the availability of shelters, when needed. We believe the OSCE can and should do more to help participating States address these issues, including in participating States that do not host OSCE field presences.

Your country visits provide us with in-depth analysis on how participating States confront domestic violence. While we all have shortcomings, it is encouraging to learn of comprehensive programs in some participating States from which we can draw best practices. Participating States East and West of Vienna should welcome your visits.

Country visits can also highlight steps needed to enhance women's political participation, something participating States committed to address in MC Decision 7/09. We note that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is an underused resource, and we encourage States to engage with the OSCE PA, as well as with ODIHR, to address this issue more broadly.

We appreciate your work analyzing how the economic environment crisis affects women. This Organization decided in MC Decision 10/11 to focus on equal opportunities for women in the economic sphere, and it is clear that more thinking can be done on how to address this topic in the future.

Your work, together with Ambassador Miroslava Beham and her team, along with ODIHR, continues to assist participating States by developing useful programs and resources. We encourage all participating States to make every effort to implement existing commitments and to continue to advance gender equality in 2014.

Finally, allow me – as this is my first time responding to you in this form – also to take the opportunity to thank you for the work that you do in the United States. Your fact-based criticism and persistent advocacy may at times make us uncomfortable as government officials but it always pushes us to do better – and I am personally grateful to you for your efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.