

# Address by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič

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## **Symposium: Launch of the Publication on Effective Approaches to Combating Violence against Women in the OSCE Area**

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**Check against delivery!**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to first of all thank the OSCE Gender Advisor for inviting me to this symposium. I listened with great interest to the excellent presentation of the publication on effective approaches in combating violence against women.

Our Office continues to maintain that it is of utmost importance to make use of good practices, experiences and expertise in any area, but particularly in the areas that have only relatively recently come to the forefront of attention of wider public, of organizations and of governments.

As it has been emphasized previously, violence against women is one of the most serious challenges in protecting and promoting human rights of women. Whether in a state of conflict or not, violence against women is a scourge common to all societies and as such represents a fundamental impediment to achieving equality of rights and opportunities among women and men.

In recent decades, awareness about violence against women has increased and the efforts to combat it have intensified. However, it has taken far too long to come to the realization

that violence and discrimination against women cannot be considered as a 'family affair' or the result of stereotypes and traditions, but that it requires decisive measures in order to protect women from violence, to hold perpetrators accountable and provide justice and remedies to victims. At the international level, various legal and policy frameworks for addressing such violence have been adopted, covering different forms of violence in public as well as in private settings. Most notably, in the Beijing Platform for Action, violence against women is stated among twelve critical areas of concern where governments, the international community, civil society, and the private sector are to take strategic action.

Within the OSCE framework, States have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to undertaking all necessary steps to end violence against women and have stressed this obligation most eloquently in the Ljubljana Ministerial Council Decision 15/05 on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women, that built up further on Gender Action plan.

In the spirit of commitments contained therein, many participating States have already acted upon, by amending legislation and practices. Nevertheless, the progress at the national level in many parts of the OSCE is still insufficient. Women continue to suffer at the hands of violent offenders be

it at home, within their community or in settings related to conflict and post-conflict situations.

There are still many parts of the OSCE region, where harmful stereotypes of women are not addressed, where women's rights are not promoted and protected sufficiently and where access of women to justice is limited, as is women's access to decision-making processes and political representation. We need to strengthen awareness against gender-based violence and impunity.

In response to these challenges, the ODIHR has provided a wide-ranging support to States in this field, including supporting reforms to establish non-discriminatory legal and policy frameworks, capacity building of the law-enforcement officials in combating violence against women, and supporting specialized NGOs in the provision of victim support services. These activities have led to improved awareness and expertise of law-enforcement officials in protecting victims and prosecuting offenders. As an example, with the ODIHR support, the Police Academy in Baku, Azerbaijan has developed and introduced a course on combating domestic violence, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Ukraine is currently working to develop a similar course.

The ODIHR has also provided numerous legal opinions on draft legislation concerning combating domestic violence to various participating States. It has organized expert roundtables to discuss internationally recognized standards and practices, and how they could be applied in national legislations. Our Office has furthermore undertaken capacity building and advocacy work to increase an understanding of women's rights – including reporting on such issues and incorporating them into national planning and policy initiatives.

In line with the key tasks outlined for the ODIHR in the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, our work is focused on how participating States ensure equal opportunities for participation in political and public life and on whether they have effective gender-equality mechanisms. Eliminating barriers for women's participation and promoting proactive measures towards this objective is one of the key strategies which advances our fight against gender-based violence and which strengthens women's own voice in the process of designing respective policies and measures.

Also in this field we take a great benefit from existing good practices and tailor our expertise accordingly in order to support reforms that empower women and promote their active participation in the democratic processes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is still a long way to go towards accomplishing all that was decided upon in the area of effective prevention of violence against women, protection of victims and prosecution of perpetrators of violent acts. The ODIHR will, in cooperation with other structures within and outside the OSCE, continue to work in this direction to provide the necessary expertise and contribute to the exchange of best practices in this field among participating States.

The decision to dedicate the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in November to this theme attests to our common determination to encourage further efforts and effective implementation of existing commitments in this field. We look forward to discussions and exchange among State representatives and the civil society on this topic and will make sure that the meeting takes the full benefit of today's discussions and the publication being launched today.

Thank you.