



## Human Dimension Implementation Meeting ODIHR activities

### **Wednesday, 4 October 2006**

#### **Working Session 4: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination I**

Including: Equality of opportunity for women and men, Role of women in conflict prevention and crisis management, prevention of violence against women

*Women's participation in democratic processes:* Throughout the OSCE area, women tend to be under-represented in legislatures, political parties and in decision making in general. One of the contributing factors is the lack of women's leadership culture. Building networks among women's groups is fundamental to their empowerment in decision making processes.

*Civil society-government dialogue for promoting gender equality:* In many countries civil society organizations have limited access to policy-making processes. Increased lobbying from Non Governmental Organisations, NGOs, however, has proved to be a key factor in promoting gender sensitive policy-making. Building a dialogue is vital in order to provide a vehicle for government outreach to the public, while giving civil society an instrument for influencing decision making.

*National gender expertise:* Consultancy and advice on the promotion of gender equality in transitional countries is commonly provided by experts and academics from established democracies. However, external advice does not always result in sustainable local efforts to achieve gender equality. Building the capacity of national experts as advisors to national policy-makers is a priority.

*Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women:* Violence against women and in particular, domestic violence is a major obstacle to women's expression of free will and full participation in public life. It often excludes women from the decision making and limits their effective engagement in democratic processes. Creating the conditions in which women feel secure is fundamental to their ability to fully participate in social, economic, and political life.

#### **ODIHR Activities Relating to this Working Session**

Recognizing that protecting the human rights of both women and men is essential to peace, security, and stability, the ODIHR established a new programme in 2005 that focuses on women's rights in relation to conflict prevention, early-warning mechanisms and human security. The programme was initiated with the intention of strengthening the connection between women's rights and issues related to the promotion of security.

In December 2005, a consultation meeting on women's rights and early-warning indicators was held in Vienna. Bringing together participants from throughout the OSCE, as well as other organizations, the meeting provided participants with an

opportunity to present their work and to discuss how the indicators already developed can be improved and how they can be used in an OSCE context. The ODIHR is planning further related follow-up activities, including development of guidelines on how violations of women's rights relate to conflict early warning, and how women's rights and gender can be integrated in early warning.

Specific attention has been given to the issue of violence against women, domestic violence, as a violation of women's human rights. A series of roundtable meetings have been organized for government officials and civil society representatives in Moldova, for discussion and elaboration on recommendations for amendments of the draft Law on Prevention and Combating of Domestic Violence in Moldova. Furthermore, a study tour to Romania has been supported for a Moldovan delegation, for exchange of information about the Romanian experiences and process of drafting a law on the addressing of domestic violence. The support given has facilitated the advancement of the drafting process and the envisioned adoption of the law. In Moldova's reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Committee, CEDAW, (reviewed by the Committee in 2006) the government reports on the legal developments as one step taken to address domestic violence. The draft law passed a first reading in the Parliament in July 2006.

Collectively covering issues of protection and promotion of women's rights, the further need for enhanced involvement of women and integration of women's contributions in conflict related areas of concern is the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The ODIHR has undertaken projects in South Eastern Europe and in Central Asia to support implementation of UNSCR 1325. By providing opportunities for State representatives of national gender mechanisms as well as civil society actors to meet on regional level in South Eastern Europe, the ODIHR has contributed to the development of a joint set of concrete conclusions on ways forward for implementation, including timeframes, indicators of progress and identification of who is accountable. Furthermore, the ODIHR has taken a regional initiative in Central Asia to gather both State representatives and civil society actors to specifically focus on implementation of UNSCR 1325, aimed at raising awareness and discussing relevant activities needed for enhancement of the implementation.

Connected to the scope of UNSCR 1325 is the issue of gender sensitivity and integration of a women's rights perspective in security sector reform. The ODIHR is planning, in cooperation with other relevant international actors, to contribute in this area through commissioning of research expert papers and development of practical reference material on how women's rights and a gender perspective can be integrated in the security sector.

**Fostering cooperation among governments/civil society to promote gender equality**

The ODIHR's work in assisting participating States to promote gender equality is based on the strategy of fostering a policy-dialogue with governments and civil society in order to strengthen their commitment to gender equality as a fundamental element of democratic development.

The ODIHR implements a targeted long-term programme on increased participation of women in democratic processes. The programme is largely focused on countries of

the South Caucasus and Central Asia; however, it also provides targeted assistance to the participating States from other regions such as Ukraine and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The priority areas for implementation include: fostering co-operation between government and civil society to promote gender equality, women's leadership development, coalition-building, and networking, preventing and combating domestic violence, and the development of national expertise on gender equality. Through its legislative support activities, the ODIHR assists participating States to promote gender equality through legal reforms. The assistance is provided in the form of reviews of draft legislation on gender equality issues and assessment of compliance with international standards.

In Armenia, the ODIHR provided both the methodology and strategy for a large-scale effort of local women's organizations to launch a public discussion with policy makers in government and parliament on ways of mainstreaming gender issues in the national education system. In Georgia, the Coalition of Women's NGOs, established with the ODIHR support, has succeeded in mobilizing the political will of the government to address gender equality in a comprehensive manner, through the establishment of the state committee for gender equality.

#### **Women's leadership development, coalition building and networking**

The ODIHR assists in leadership development, coalition building and networking activities in order to increase the participation of women in democratic processes. The women's leadership networks in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, developed with the ODIHR assistance have promoted local democratization processes by increasing women's participation in decision making processes at various levels. In Georgia, the Women's NGO Coalition of Georgia, has worked on enhancing the role and impact of women's organizations in conflict prevention and conflict resolution processes. In Kyrgyzstan, as part of its strategy to ensure protection of women's rights and combat violence against women, the ODIHR supports the efforts of the Regional Women's Network of Kyrgyzstan to conduct awareness raising campaigns on the role of women in conflict prevention and crisis management.

#### **Development of national expertise on gender equality**

Competent national experts capable of influencing developments at local, national and international levels, with first-hand expertise in gender issues and knowledge of existing needs in the local context are crucial to the sustainability of the ODIHR's programmes. To this end, the ODIHR has created a NGO Expert Panel on Gender Equality, comprising 15 civil society experts from Central Asia and South Caucasus, which works to promote women's leadership and increased participation of women in decision making across the region. With the ODIHR's support and expertise, the Panel has developed a strategy, whereby members utilize their respective experiences and lessons learnt to foster the necessary reforms to promote gender equality.

#### **Prevention of violence against women**

In line with its mandate for assisting participating States in combating violence against women, the ODIHR, has developed activities to support participating States in awareness-raising among law enforcement officers and others of the problem of violence against women and capacity building initiatives to support the development of adequate prosecution and victim rehabilitation measures. In Azerbaijan and Georgia, the ODIHR provides strategic guidance and expertise to its local civil

society partners in strengthening awareness of the issue among police and health care/medical professionals. In Armenia, the ODIHR provided capacity building training to prosecutors on international standards and best practices in combating domestic violence. In addition, the ODIHR assists civil society organizations to provide support to victims through shelters, legal advice and counselling.