

United States Mission to the OSCE



**Statement on International
Women's Day**

As prepared for delivery by Chargé d'Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 11, 2010

On the occasion of International Women's Day this week, we take the floor to remind ourselves why equality of opportunity between women and men and the promotion of women's rights is so important, and why it should become a greater focus in the work we do here in the OSCE.

The United States believes the full and equal exercise by women of their human rights is essential to achieving more peaceful, secure, and democratic societies. We must recognize that it is a human rights issue when women are excluded from the peace negotiations or political decision-making processes that affect their lives. And it is a human rights issue when women and girls are held like chattel by human traffickers, without legal recourse for domestic violence or discrimination, or restricted in accessing employment, schooling, health care or other basic services.

Women's issues are a critical component of the most urgent transnational problems we face today in the OSCE area, and they should be on the agenda in all of our endeavors. Women are essential agents and an often overlooked resource in the preservation of security and in overcoming transnational threats such as trafficking, poverty, and extremism.

In the security area, when women are targeted in conflicts, societies fray and destabilize, the places that most exclude women from public life and seek to constrain their lives are the same in which extremist ideology finds a receptive home. In the economic sphere, study upon study has shown that aid given to women is reinvested in their communities, and skills-development programs turn women into drivers of economic growth.

The United States strongly supports ODIHR's legislative assistance to participating States to ensure laws on equal opportunity are in compliance with OSCE commitments and international standards. We also support ODIHR's programs to increase participation of women in democratic processes, and ensure that gender issues are part of its election observations. Only when women participate fully in the political process can real democracy flourish.

We commend the OSCE's internal efforts to provide equal employment opportunities, gender-oriented training and increased retainment of qualified female employees in our institutions and missions. We therefore appeal to our colleagues around the table to support the draft decision on promoting greater gender equality in the OSCE which we proudly co-sponsor.

We welcome the Chairmanship's emphasis on gender equality this year and stands ready to promote programs and support projects in this area.

We look forward to the time when International Women's Day will be a historical and retrospective celebration of women's path to the achievement of equality – when every day belongs equally to women and to men, and every day is a good day for human rights.