



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on International Women's Day

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 10, 2011

As we join in commemorating the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day on March 8, we recognize that women globally have made significant gains in some areas. Despite the progress, vast inequalities persist. The potential of women to contribute to economic growth and prosperity, social progress, peace, and good governance is still largely untapped in too many places. At the same time, gender-based violence not only destroys the lives of individual girls and women, families, and communities, but also robs the world of the talent it urgently needs.

In recognition of the importance of this occasion, we would like to share with you a short video by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. [video is shown]

As the world marked International Women's Day, Secretary Clinton participated in a celebration in Washington, D.C., with First Lady Michelle Obama to present the International Women of Courage Awards to 10 honorees from around the globe. The recipients represent women who work in their countries against corruption and injustice, and who fight for human rights, good governance and economic opportunity. They are agents of change. Overcoming poverty, discrimination, and violence, the honorees not only champion the rights of women and girls, but also serve as an inspiration to us all. Three of the awardees come from the OSCE area: Kyrgyzstan President Roza Otunbayeva; Agnes Osztolykan from Hungary, who is the only female Roma Member of Parliament; and Nasta Palazhanka of Belarus, who serves as the Deputy Chairperson of the Malady Front (Young Front) NGO. Unfortunately, Nasta was unable to attend the ceremony since she is currently facing charges of allegedly participating in the so-called "mass riot" of December 19. Despite threats and politically-motivated pressure and harassment against herself and her family, she continues to advocate for civil society freedoms and promote respect for fundamental human rights.

The United States believes that full and equal human rights for women are 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 as slaves by human traffickers, without legal recourse for domestic violence or discrimination, or restricted in accessing employment, schooling, health care or other basic services. 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.

In this vein, we commend the efforts of the Secretariat's Gender Section to confront these challenges. The successful "Women's Entrepreneurship" conference held just last week in Vilnius is one such testimonial. 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 and true security flourish.

We would also like to thank the CiO's Special Representative on Gender Affairs Wendy Patten for her letter distributed to Heads of Delegation on March 8. We are also convinced that we have to do a much better job in our own house in appointing qualified women to Heads of Mission and other high-level positions inside the OSCE, as well as promoting their empowerment and development in their own countries. We thank her also for calling our attention to an alarming statistic: the appointment of only 3 female Heads of Mission among 114 selected. Even with the advancements made by the CiO and the Secretary General to include more women in the composition of selection panels and advisory groups, more must still be done.

Circumscribing women's participation and leaving their potential untapped shortchanges women and shortchanges our world. We vitally need women's talents, experiences, and leadership. Today, as on March 8, we celebrate the contributions of women. Everywhere they are making a difference. Many do so with great courage and often at great personal risk. They are changing the world for the better.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.