

Statement
by Ambassador Andrej Benedejčič
Chairperson of the OSCE MenEngage Network
at the 1219th Meeting of the Permanent Council
on the occasion of the International Women's Day
Vienna, 7 March 2019

Mr. Chairperson,

I am addressing the Permanent Council in my capacity as the Chairperson of the OSCE MenEngage Network. As many of you know, the Network was launched in 2012 in cooperation with the OSCE Gender Section. The aim was to enlist the support of men in promoting gender equality, especially in the politico-military dimension. That is why its first two Chairs were Military Advisers. In light of the cross-dimensional nature of women's rights it was decided in 2015 to raise its leadership to the level of a Permanent Representative. As the Chair of the Network he bears special responsibility for increasing its visibility and raising awareness about the important role that men and boys can play in the elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girls. I am therefore pleased to be speaking on behalf of the Network's members who are fellow diplomats, military advisers and members of the OSCE Secretariat from Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chairperson,

The International Women's Day, which we are celebrating tomorrow, represents a welcome opportunity to assess our collective efforts in advancing gender equality. This is especially important in light of the fact that women's empowerment is inextricably linked with the concept of comprehensive security. Women's rights are not only human rights, but also a key driver of economic development and prosperity, as well as an integral element of efficient and effective military missions and peace support operations. The changing nature of contemporary conflict has blurred the line between combatants and civilians and made demands for new skills and a flexible approach. In other words, gender mainstreaming across three of the OSCE's security dimensions is both the right thing and the smart thing to do.

The need for a pro-active approach to achieve gender equality has been also recognized by other Vienna-based Organizations. In June 2017 they even came together in launching the International Gender Champions initiative at the Vienna International Center. I am pleased to report that as the Chair of the OSCE MenEngage Network I was actively involved in bringing this about. The establishment of a champions' network was all the more significant given that the international organizations in Vienna deal with traditionally male domains, which are either science or security oriented. It is also because of these similarities that we should seek synergies in promoting women's rights and equal opportunities.

I am therefore proud to report that it was also on the basis of the good experience with the IGC website that last May, on the margins of the FSC Security Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security, a dedicated webpage of the OSCE MenEngage Network was launched. This is important not only in terms of publicity, but also because of the welcome visibility of personal commitments that its members have undertaken. At the end of June this was followed by the first-ever staging at the OSCE of the acclaimed documentary play SEVEN, which relays the real-life experiences of women from around the world in facing not only violence, but also systemic political and economic discrimination. The fact that the event coincided with the first day of the Annual Security Review Conference went a long way in underlining the nexus between women's rights and our collective security. In November, members of the Network came together to make a video on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. It was shown at the Permanent Council and its message was clear; namely, that gender equality is a cross-cutting issue that affects all the participating States; that women's empowerment benefits all of us; and that violence against women and girls takes many different forms and has a destructive impact on our societies. The fact that the OSCE Ministerial Decision on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, which was adopted in Milan a week later, noted the efforts of the OSCE MenEngage Network in promoting women's rights therefore represents a welcome recognition of the work of its members and an important incentive for the future.

Of course, the overview of these collective actions would not be complete without acknowledging the individual contributions by members of the Network to promoting gender equality, which are significant. The Network, after all, includes not only former and current chairpersons of the Permanent Council and the FSC, but also of committees and informal working groups. It also consists of people who either are or were actively involved in making these endeavors a success. I must therefore especially highlight the Italian OSCE Chairmanship of 2018, which stayed true to its announced gender-sensitive approach and to mainstreaming a gender perspective into all initiatives. This was not only shown by the way it conducted negotiations on the already mentioned decision from Milan, but also by outstanding events such as the Chairmanship conferences on "Women in the Security Sector" and "Digital Transformation – Challenges and Opportunities for Women to Shape Economic Progress in the OSCE area". Similarly, last year, the Slovenian FSC Chairmanship paid special attention to implementing the panel parity pledge and avoiding all male panels or "manels". As a result, out of 31 speakers at its Security Dialogues 42% were women, including the first female Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces. The Swedish FSC Chairmanship, for its part, organized a Special Session to commemorate the 18th anniversary of the adoption of UNSCR 1325. This event was followed by a panel discussion and release of the OSCE handbook on "Gender in Military Operations", which brings home the message that integrating gender perspective in operational planning and activities benefits military missions and operations. Needless to say, in light of this positive experience, we all look forward to the forthcoming Security Dialogue of the current Swiss FSC Chairmanship on Women, Peace and Security, which will take place on March 27.

Another important aspect about the Network is that it includes representatives of the OSCE Secretariat, including the Secretary General. The extent to which the Executive Structures have committed themselves to promoting gender mainstreaming within the organization therefore also represents the fulfillment of their pledges as the "engaged men" of the OSCE. A clear example of this is the Executive Gender Coaching program, piloted in the Secretariat with the Secretary General and Directors. It not only enhances the awareness, but also builds the capacity of OSCE senior leaders to advance the implementation of gender commitments.

Before concluding, I would like to recall that we will soon be marking fifteen years since the adoption of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. This is one of the more important documents of the OSCE, also in light of the changing nature of contemporary conflicts and security challenges. It is therefore important that we use this anniversary year to show in practice that we understand the inseparable link between gender equality and the concept of comprehensive security. Members of the OSCE MenEngage Network have already shown in practice how men can engage to promote the rights and well-being of women and girls. However, we would not have been able to do it alone. I would therefore like to use this opportunity to thank the Gender Section and the Communications and Media Relations Section for all the support they have provided us so far. Together we are stronger. Let me recognize as well the Delegation of the European Union to the OSCE for its steadfast support of women's rights. The fact that equality between women and men is one of the fundamental values of the EU is an inspiration to all of us. I also cannot but use this opportunity to call on other male colleagues to join us in this struggle, which is as much their fight as that of our female colleagues.

Finally, let me conclude by thanking our Slovak friends for having placed the issue of women's rights so high on the agenda of their OSCE Chairmanship. This is in line with last year's joint FSC-PC on the topic of Security Sector Governance and Reform, co-chaired by Slovakia and Italy, where all speakers underlined the importance of engaging women to achieve an inclusive security sector under democratic control. Let me therefore conclude by reminding us all that women's rights are human rights also in the language of this year's OSCE Chairmanship: *práva žien sú ľudské práva!*

Thank you.