



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Occasion of International Women's Day

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 12, 2020

Today, as we commemorate International Women's Day in this Council, we should take time to reflect on progress that has been made, call for still-needed change, and commemorate acts of courage and determination by women who have made a difference in their communities and countries. Together, we must continue our work to increase gender equality and equal opportunities for all.

The United States is making great strides toward these goals, both at home and around the world. Last year, we launched the Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative (W-GDP), the first whole-of-government effort to advance women's economic empowerment, with a goal of reaching 50 million women in the developing world by 2025. The principal leader of this initiative is Ivanka Trump, daughter of and advisor to President Trump. As the President has explained, "The initiative recognizes that societies that empower women to participate fully in civic and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful." So far, in its first year alone, this program has connected with 12 million women in developing countries.

On March 4, Secretary Pompeo hosted the annual International Women of Courage Award Ceremony, honoring 12 women from around the world – including two from the OSCE region and one from an OSCE Partner country. Lucy Kocharyan of Armenia launched the initiative "Voices of Violence," which raises awareness about the prevalence of gender-based violence, despite harsh criticism. Shahla Humbatova of Azerbaijan is a legal advocate who defends individuals facing punishment for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Before the age of 26, Zarifa Ghafari of Afghanistan had launched a women-focused radio station. She faced death threats as a mayor in conservative Wardak province, yet she continued her work uncowed.

The United States is making progress on this issue domestically as well. In June 2019, we released the U.S. National Strategy on Women, Peace and Security.

The strategy is our first whole-of-government plan which directs federal departments and agencies to promote the meaningful inclusion of women in economic, political, and social life as a means of minimizing conflict and building peace.

Women play a central role in the U.S. economy, and we are taking steps to make it easier for them and their families when they participate in the workforce. For example, beginning in October of this year federal workers—both male and female—will be entitled to paid family leave when they welcome a new child into their homes.

Mr. Chair, there is more we can and should be doing at the OSCE as well to improve respect for the rights of women and advance gender equality and equal opportunity. We must hold ourselves and each other accountable. The Third Gender Equality Review Conference on June 29 and 30 will provide us with a valuable opportunity to take stock of what we have achieved, and where we need to do better.

The assault and subsequent detention by police of peaceful demonstrators for women's rights in Kyrgyzstan on March 8, International Women's Day, is a telling example of the challenges women confront, and the risks that they take, to make their voices heard.

The demonstrators, who were peacefully protesting violence against women, were assaulted by counter-protesters, who acted with impunity despite the presence of the police. The police then detained more than 50 of the peaceful protestors.

We also remain concerned about a 2017 Russian law that made beatings by "close relatives" an administrative rather than a criminal offense for first-time offenders, provided the beating did not cause injury requiring hospital treatment. Human rights groups believe the law has fostered a sense of impunity among abusers, weakened victim protections, and created new barriers to prosecuting domestic violence.

Barriers to full gender equality include violence in the family, harassment at work or online, discriminatory laws and cultural attitudes, conflict, forced migration and displacement, and poverty. But these problems are not without solutions, and they do not lack courageous individuals to implement them.

The OSCE's contributions include efforts to combat violence against women, promoting women in mediation, and training law enforcement and armed forces on gender-sensitive approaches to their work.

The OSCE has much to offer to help empower women and promote gender equality. ODIHR's gender audit, for example, can advance equality within political parties and elected bodies by providing technical advice on making party structures, policies, and platforms more gender sensitive. OSCE field operations and other executive structures are conducting activities to empower women economically, promote their political participation through formal elections, and improve their ability to influence public debate through freely exercising their views.

In closing, we not only have a responsibility to help every participating State meet its commitments related to gender equality, we also have a responsibility to "practice what we preach." Delegations need to promote the equal opportunities of qualified female candidates for positions at the OSCE. Countries should encourage women to enter their diplomatic corps,

which will promote more diversity in representation at embassies and multilateral bodies such as the OSCE. The OSCE's executive structures have begun to improve gender balance in hiring. This is a welcome step, but executive structures should also take measures to improve gender balance in other areas, such as inviting women speakers to OSCE events. And the OSCE must do better in making the organization a better and safer place to work through a zero-tolerance policy on harassment, including sexual harassment, and through introducing policies to combat gender discrimination.

I welcome the Secretary General's offer during the Parliamentary Assembly's Winter Session to make the report on the Safe Spaces Survey more widely available.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.