

OSCE Gender Equality Review Conference

ENGLISH only

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Opening Session

**Mr. Pekka Haavisto
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Mr. Secretary General, Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this highly relevant conference. Finland is known for her commitment to gender equality both home and abroad. This conviction springs from our own experience: my country has benefited enormously from increasing gender equality and women's participation in all sectors of society. We recognize that much work remains to be done both domestically and internationally, and we see the OSCE as a key forum and partner in this work.

I shall focus my remarks on how to further integrate gender into our considerations on comprehensive security.

Women, Peace and Security at the OSCE: from why to how

The case for women, peace and security has been well articulated ever since the United Nations Security Council passed its resolution 1325 in 2000. Follow-up resolutions have elaborated the international normative framework, and many states, international organizations and other entities have adopted their own action plans for implementation. Next year will mark the fifteenth anniversary of resolution 1325. It gives us an occasion to review the status of implementation and consider ways forward.

The OSCE, as the world's largest regional security organization and with its comprehensive concept of security, is extremely well positioned to make a unique and important contribution in advancing gender equality. The OSCE 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality was a milestone in this respect. The Action Plan underlined the beneficial role the OSCE can play in enhancing the implementation of our common commitments, taking into account the Security Council resolution 1325. These commitments have been further strengthened within the OSCE by the ministerial council decisions on Women in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation in 2005 and on Elements of the Conflict Cycle in 2011.

Indeed, the case for 1325 agenda is sufficiently well made to allow us to turn our attention from the "why" towards the "how" question. The lack of implementation is mostly not due to the lack of understanding or evidence of its relevance. Obstacles to implementation include mainstreaming that has been implemented only half way, political inertia and insufficient political will.

Calls for further action are already present. I would like to take this opportunity to thank participating States for their support to the common initiative of Austria, Finland, Turkey and Kazakhstan for the development and adoption of an OSCE Wide Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. We remain committed to advancing the draft Action Plan, which would make an important contribution to the work of the OSCE in this field. It would also give the OSCE good reference point for engaging with the UN in next year's review of Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Women as agents of change in conflict and post-conflict settings

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The vast body of research and experience available teaches us that women and girls are not, in the first place, mere victims in conflict situations. In fact, their roles vary as much as those of men. Women are sometimes acting themselves as drivers of conflict, or as important economic actors, and in many places they are supporting the fighting in various positions or fighting themselves. More importantly still, they are powerful agents of peace and change before, during and after conflicts. However, this active role of women for peace suffers from existing gender inequalities. This is one expression of the way how gender inequality leaves us all worse off. For this and other reasons, while we need to address the protection and distinct needs of women and girls in conflicts, we should also play particular emphasis on supporting their active roles in preventing, managing and solving conflicts, and building more durable peace.

Gender and Mediation

An important case in point is women's role in mediation. During past few years, Finland has invested considerable efforts in developing the international mediation framework to support mediation efforts on the ground, especially through the United Nations and regional organizations, in particular the OSCE and the EU. Gender is a key element in this approach.

Regional organizations such as the OSCE can play a very prominent role in mediation. Finland supports the impressive OSCE activities in mainstreaming gender-sensitive approach to mediation through financial and human resources to the Conflict Prevention Centre of the Secretariat. I hope that the OSCE Group of Friends of Mediation, launched in March by Finland, Turkey and the Swiss Chairmanship, will also be instrumental in mobilizing support for women's participation in mediation.

The OSCE is known for its strong field presence, exemplified again by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. From the gender perspective, what we especially need is more women in senior positions such as mission leaders and deputies, and as lead mediators and advisers to them. Field missions always benefit from having a well-placed gender adviser working directly with the leadership of the mission to integrate gender considerations in the analysis and activities. Inclusive decision-making makes for more sustainable solutions. Therefore promoting women's effective participation in mediation and political decision-making processes is extremely important.

Tackling vulnerabilities: the case of Roma women

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Active participation of women at all levels is a key consideration of gender equality, and it is linked to the protection dimension. This is clearly illustrated by the case of Roma women, who are in many corners of Europe among the most marginalized, and often suffer from multiple discrimination. Yet we should see the potential of Roma women for the whole Roma minority and the broader society, and empower them to act as agents for change.

Last September, Finland hosted a European conference of Roma Women, which led them to design a "Strategy of the Advancement of Romani Women and Girls" and a related action plan. The conference also saw the formation of the so called "Phenjalipe" Network of Roma women experts.

Empowerment and awareness-raising, especially among Roma women themselves, are cornerstones in these efforts to advance the equality, well-being and security of all Roma in Europe.

I would like to commend the important work done in this field by the OSCE, including by the ODIHR and the High Commissioner for National Minorities. In the future, more efforts should be directed at the grassroots level, for example in ensuring school enrolment and preventing early marriages of Roma girls.

Discrimination, lack of personal security and general threat of violence effectively prevent people from taking part in the development of their own communities and society. On the other hand, the empowerment of women to act on their own behalf, and on an equal standing with men, creates a solid constituency for tackling inequality and vulnerabilities that they face.

OSCE efforts and prevention of future conflicts

With these examples of mediation and Roma women, you can see the complexity of how gender equality matters for security, and for the OSCE itself.

Gender is increasingly integrated in our activities. For example, I highly appreciate the way the Chief Monitor of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, highlights the crucial importance of duly incorporating a gender perspective in the work of the Special Monitoring Mission. I concur with him that it is vital to include women at all levels in the political dialogue. I know, also from my own experience in peace-building, the importance of inclusive decision-making. I am proud that Finland has been able to deploy as many women as men in the Special Monitoring Mission.

Efforts to manage unresolved conflicts and prevent future ones should also include a gender perspective. Inequalities often leave women in a more vulnerable situation at the time of crisis. Conflicts aggravate these vulnerabilities and turn risks into personal losses. The lesson is that gender equality reduces such vulnerabilities in the first place, and at the same time strengthens the resilience of the society overall.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to conclude by praising the potential gains that the OSCE can bring to bear in promoting gender equality and mainstreaming it into our thinking on security. This covers elements ranging from the traditional political-military dimension and security sector to promoting gender equality through political participation and economic empowerment and fighting gender-based violence.

The OSCE is well-placed to do this, and it already has many key instruments and practices in place. Still, there is room for improvement, and full equality remains a somewhat distant goal for us. We must grasp all opportunities to systematically approach this goal and put our collective weight behind our efforts. I wish you the best success in these endeavors.

Thank you.