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**Joint statement by the OSCE Women Ambassadors' network in response to the annual progress report on the implementation of the OSCE 2004 Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality**

Madame Chair, I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Women Ambassadors and Representatives to the OSCE of Andorra, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, the European Union, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Mongolia, Norway, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey and the US.

We commend Secretary General Helga Schmid for providing such an insightful report on the implementation of the OSCE 2004 Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality. The importance of promoting gender equality within the OSCE as a commitment agreed to by all participating States cannot be underestimated.

As you rightly point out, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women and girls. We recognize the swift action undertaken by the Secretariat, Autonomous Institutions and field operations to impart duty of care to its staff and to mitigate the exacerbated effects of lock-down measures on women and girls through research, sharing of best-practices and providing practical support to participating States. We particularly commend the work of the field missions in responding to the increase in domestic violence during the pandemic, providing assistance to over 8,000 women in the OSCE region.

The gender balance at the top of our organisation has improved significantly. For the first time in its 45-year long history there is real gender parity at the very top of our organisation. While we have made progress on gender equality, more remains to be done, especially at the mid-career level and in the field. We commend Secretary General Helga Schmid's commitment to address the remaining challenges across the OSCE Executive Structures and stand ready to support her. The participating States should do their share by nominating more qualified women for seconded positions.

Getting the numbers right alone will not suffice. Fostering of a gender-sensitive and inclusive management culture and working environment, where there is zero tolerance for harassment, sexual exploitation, abuse and discrimination benefits both the staff as the OSCE itself. With this in mind, we encourage the Secretariat to further develop training and awareness raising campaigns on combating sexual exploitation and abuse and on gender equality.

The OSCE is not only a multilateral forum, but also an actor on its own. We strongly welcome the participation of Secretary General Helga Schmidt in the Generation Equality Forum in Paris, from June 30 to July 2, seizing the opportunity to build on a multilateral and multi-stakeholder momentum to the promotion of gender equality and to reaffirm that gender equality is at the heart of the OSCE's understanding of comprehensive security.

To conclude, we thank the Secretary General for all her efforts in this field and the Swedish Chairpersonship for relentlessly keeping gender equality high on our common agenda. Know that you can count on our full support in making sure that women and girls can reach their full potential, fulfil their aspirations and realise their human rights. Only then will we have achieved the comprehensive security we all strive for.