



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Occasion of International Women's Day

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 7, 2024

The United States fully aligns with the joint statement to be delivered by Germany on behalf of 45 participating States. I would like to say a few words in my national capacity.

First I want to thank Special Representative Palihovici for your address today and for everything you do to advance gender equality at the OSCE.

As we mark International Women's Day, we reaffirm our strong commitment to the full, meaningful, equal, and equitable participation of women in all their diversity in our societies and economies. We also pay tribute to the women in the OSCE region and around the world who are standing up for what is right – often in the face of tremendous challenges – and working to improve gender equality in their communities and their countries.

Women like Ukrainian human rights lawyer Yevheniya Zakrevska, a tireless advocate for the families of those killed during Ukraine's 2014 Revolution of Dignity and for Crimean Tatar political prisoners; a woman who is now helping defend her country as an aerial reconnaissance officer. Or women like Ukrainian Paramedic Yuliia "Taira" Paievska, who received the State Department's International Women of Courage award last year as head of a volunteer unit of paramedics who responded to the needs of Ukrainians directly affected by Russia's war against Ukraine and who documented atrocities committed by Russia's military forces in a very effective and powerful way. Yevheniya and Taira are two of the many courageous women of Ukraine, who, alongside their compatriots, are on the frontlines defending their country from Russia's brutal war.

That's why the war propaganda from the Russian delegate, whose own government is responsible literally for the killing of hundreds of Ukraine's women and girls, is so outrageous. I'm glad though that he mentioned the boycott of his country's propaganda event here in the Hofburg - shamefully held here in the Hofburg I may add -, but he didn't explain why no one showed up at that event. Of course, he knows why, but he just doesn't want to say it.

Madam Chair, this year, on March 4, Secretary Blinken and First Lady Jill Biden once again hosted a group of extraordinary women from around the world at the White House to honor them as the newest recipients of the International Women of Courage Award. Four of these

women are from OSCE participating States or from Partners for Cooperation, and I would like to recognize them today:

- Volha Harbunova is a Belarusian human rights defender who has dedicated her life to advocating for the human rights of women, children, LGBTQI+ persons, and members of other marginalized groups in Belarus. Many of you heard her speak at the 2023 Warsaw Human Dimension Conference;
- Ajna Jusić, from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who founded the Forgotten Children of War Association, the first organization in the Western Balkans to advocate for the social and legal status of children born of rape during war;
- Benafsha Yaqoobi, a visually impaired Afghan attorney now living in exile, who has served on the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and advocated for the education of blind children; and
- Rabha El Haymar, a Moroccan woman, who raises awareness about the plight of mothers of undocumented children.

As Secretary Blinken said on this occasion, “The United States stands with every woman of courage working to build greater stability, greater equality, and greater opportunity. And we are committed to knocking down the barriers that prevent women and girls from reaching their full potential alongside them.”

But, colleagues, there is more work to be done. Real gender equality requires men to be active allies. All of us – and especially men – need to insist on gender equality. We appreciate that the OSCE no longer allows all male panels, for example. There are plenty of women with the expertise to speak on any topic, and this policy is important. But it is not enough.

As an International Gender Champion and member of the OSCE’s Men Engage Network, I have pledged to advocate for gender parity on panels, work to eradicate sexist attitudes, and have zero tolerance, zero, for gender-based violence. I call on each and every one of us to redouble our efforts to strive towards greater gender equality. As we celebrate the 20-year anniversary of the OSCE’s Gender Equality Action Plan, we can all be gender champions and take personal pledges to advance gender equality in our work.

Advancing gender equality, or same treatment, and gender equity, or fair treatment, is a priority of the United States government. Here it is important to explain the distinction. While gender equality ensures equal treatment, gender equity ensures that women are treated fairly due to the unique challenges they face. For example, it means that while women may have access to leadership opportunities, it is imperative to address the barriers that limit their ability to fully participate, and increase access to resources, services, and meaningful opportunities to engage. These barriers can range from wage gaps, systemic and social barriers to participation, and other issues.

In October 2021, the U.S. first-ever National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality was released, which reaffirms that advancing the rights and empowerment of women and girls, in

all their diversity, is both a moral and a strategic imperative, as well as a core component of U.S. foreign policy and national security.

To further promote gender equality and equity, the Biden Administration released two new strategies last year: one on combating gender-based violence and another on improving women's economic security both at home and abroad, as referred to by the Special Representative. These strategies are rooted in recognition that women are disproportionately affected by violence and economic barriers. The strategies are also especially timely as many countries risk setbacks to the progress they have made because of increasing gender-based violence, including femicide, and the persistent gender wage gap.

The OSCE is a valuable partner in our efforts to improve gender equality, including the full, equal and equitable, and meaningful political and economic participation of women in all their diversity and to tear down barriers to achieving that. We welcome the Secretary General's policy of zero tolerance for sexual harassment as outlined in Staff Instruction 21 on the professional working environment. And, we are a proud contributor to ODIHR's CHANGE program and the Secretariat's WIN program, to which we contributed \$100,000 and \$500,000 respectively in 2023.

Once again, thank you Special Representative Palihovici for your tremendous work.

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