



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Experts' seminar on innovative approaches to combating violence against women - Dushanbe, 20-22 October 2008

Opening address by Jamila Seftaoui, OSCE Senior Adviser on Gender Issues

In my name and in the name of the OSCE Secretary General, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all participants who came to share their knowledge and questions in this Seminar on innovative ways to tackling violence against women.

I am honoured to share the podium with Her Excellency the Deputy Prime Minister of Tajikistan, Ms. Kurbanova, with Ambassador Kahiluoto, the representative of the OSCE Chairman in office, with Ambassador Marinaki, our incoming Chairperson in office, and with Ambassador Pryakhin, the head of the OSCE office in Tajikistan.

This Seminar is part of our continuing effort at the OSCE to advance in ending violence against women. Preventing and combating violence against women is a priority area of the OSCE work. In 2004, the 56 OSCE participating States (from Vancouver to Vladivostok) have highlighted the importance of this matter through the adoption of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and through a ministerial decision in 2005 specifically dedicated to combating violence against women. A number of recommendations have been, since, issued to participating States of the OSCE on the types of measures to be taken to improve the prevention, the protection of and assistance to female victims. The OSCE considers violence against women as a serious obstacle to the realisation of gender equality and at the same time, as a result of gender disparities in the rights, the access to education, resources and decision making.

While there are no universal statistics on the prevalence or incidence of violence against women, several studies suggest that violence against women is distressingly common. By some estimates, as many as one woman in three has experienced some form of physical,

sexual or psychological violence in her lifetime. According to recent multi-country data from the WHO, between 15 and 70% of women have suffered from violence on the hands of an intimate partner. Moreover, with almost each armed conflict, the international community is awakened by journalists, warned by observers and by victims that rape, sexual and human rights abuses of women and girls occur as one among other war practices.

Since the CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), important initiatives to address this phenomenon have taken place. The international commitments articulated by the UN and by many regional organizations such as the CoE, the EU and the OSCE, have been followed by the creation of national legal and political mechanisms to address violence against women, and by conducting a number of researches and supporting global and regional prevention campaigns. Women's organizations and Governments around the world have worked for the adoption of laws and the expansion of social service networks to better assist victims of violence and prosecute aggressors.

Yet despite more than a decade of activity, it is a paradox to note that the world does not appear to be more safe and more secure for women now than it was at all times. Surely, data on violence is becoming more and more accessible, and there are countless projects addressing VAW, but the challenges are more complex, the threats in the era of organized crimes of human trafficking are much more difficult to dismantle, the resistance to change and the backlash against women's rights, empowerment and advancement are more insidious, more sophisticated.

It is in this climate that attention to effective practices and the ability to adapt strategies to changing circumstances are vital for our efforts to prevent and end violence against women. This is the more so, as we must acknowledge that despite an immense number of projects and programs devoted to eliminating VAW around the world, there are only few compilations of what could be considered as practical responses and only rare accounts of what concrete activities have worked and what results and successes have been achieved. The OSCE is, by the imperative of its mandate of comprehensive security and by its large geographic outreach, naturally well placed both to create the opportunity for such an exchange and to tremendously benefit from it.

In this context, dear participants, allow me to underline that the objective of the working sessions of this Seminar is by no mean to use the time to lament the cruelty and the incredible scope of violence against women. We are pursuing rather the objective to expose for the common knowledge, benefit and debate the results of your work, the work of your organization and your country to respond with appropriate measures to exactly act on this cruelty, to raise awareness, to protect victims and to provide proper redress for these crimes and human rights violations. Our ultimate objective is to facilitate the inspiration by and the transferability of the one or the other practice. We look forward to supporting partnerships and initiatives by our participating States with practical responses to end violence against women.

The speakers we have invited will share with us practices pertaining to the three pillars of prevention, protection and prosecution. A special attention is given, in this Seminar, to both parts of the humanity: the women and the men. A part of this Seminar is dedicated to addressing perpetrators and to positively involving men and youth in combating violence against women.

The OSCE has recognized Central Asia as a region of increasing and promising activity on violence against women. It is also a region where violence against women appears to be on the increase. We believe that in Central Asia, like in any other part of the world, there is greatest need for exchange on tested approaches. We value, in this context, the cooperation with various Central Asian Governments and Organizations and I wish to extend my particular appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan for jointly organizing this Seminar with the OSCE.

I thank you all, dear participants, for your time and contributions. They will make the quality of this Seminar!

Before concluding, I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of Austria, Finland, France, Germany and Greece for their financial contributions in support of the preparation of this Seminar and the whole project.

I will stop here, and turn the floor over to Ms. Elisabeth Duban for an overview on VAW in Central Asia.