



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Secretary General's Speech

High-Level Opening Panel of the Gender Conference

Combating violence against women in the OSCE region – bringing security home

Vienna, 22 July 2016

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you to this conference on combating violence against women in the OSCE region.

Violence against women is not only a grave violation of human rights. It is a global epidemic that casts a dark shadow on the lives of millions of women and girls and hampers progress towards comprehensive security for all. By now, the statistics are well known but they remain shocking: one in three women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, perpetrated by intimate partners, family members, acquaintances and strangers. Millions of women fear for their safety, are harassed or exploited. This does not only impact their personal safety and security, but it also prevents them to participate in society and contribute their skills, knowledge and competencies.

Violence against women takes place in conflict and non-conflict settings, but its exact scope remains difficult to assess. Many women and girls who experience violence never speak out or seek help, due to fear, shame and lack of support. A survey on violence against women that was released by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency in 2014 shows that four of five women who experience violence do not seek help.

During conflict, gender-based violence often intensifies and additional forms of violence appear, including sexual exploitation, transactional sex and forced marriages. Conflict-related sexual violence is still often considered a taboo, even though attention to the issue has increased since adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 which has just been complemented by UN Security Council Resolution 2242.

At the OSCE, fighting violence against women was included as a priority in the OSCE's 2004 Gender Action Plan. The Action Plan calls on OSCE executive structures to develop and implement projects to prevent violence against women, provide support to victims and empower women by addressing negative gender stereotypes that contribute to the persistence of violence against women.

In 2005, the Ljubljana Ministerial Council encouraged the OSCE participating States to take all necessary legislative, policy and programmatic as well as monitoring and evaluation measures to promote and protect the human rights of women and to prevent and combat all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls.

At last year's Ministerial Council in Belgrade, OSCE commitments were aligned with relevant new international standards, in particular, the *Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*. The Belgrade decision calls on OSCE participating States to develop their legal frameworks and partnerships to prevent and prosecute violence against women, and protect the victims. It also tasks the OSCE to improve co-operation with international and regional

organizations and collect sex-disaggregated data and statistics on the occurrence of all forms of violence against women in the OSCE area.

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past decade, many OSCE participating States have improved their legal frameworks to better protect survivors, including with the support of OSCE field operations and ODIHR. The Istanbul Convention has been signed by 42 and ratified by 22 OSCE participating States. More data and awareness now exist on the prevalence of violence against women.

But while it is obviously key to have a strong policy framework, what matters most to me is action and the OSCE executive structures remain strongly engaged. The Gender Section is preparing to conduct a survey on the well-being and safety of women in a number of OSCE participating States. ODIHR regularly reviews existing and prospective legislation on preventing and combating violence against women, often with the aim of harmonizing national legal frameworks with the Istanbul Convention.

Many OSCE field operations work on prevention issues, support victims of violence and draft legislation for improved access to justice. For example, they participate in the annual “16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence” campaign. Last year, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan organized a campaign titled “Men Engage to Combat Violence against Women”, with prominent men from political and public life in Tajikistan. The OSCE Mission in Kosovo supported the drafting of a new strategy and action plan against domestic violence and supported the establishment of municipal co-ordination mechanisms on domestic violence in pilot municipalities. And, to mention a further example,

the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine supported the training of 9,000 new police patrol officers (of whom 20 per cent were women) on how to handle domestic violence incidents and deal with various forms of trafficking in human beings.

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While we take note of past and current achievements and activities, we should use this meeting to seek creative solutions and new approaches. Today, we will be hearing from government representatives, international organizations, including UN Women and the Council of Europe, as well as civil society organizations. I look forward to your recommendations on how to translate our commitments into concrete action.

Finally I thank the Gender Section for organizing this conference and all of you, but in particular the German Chairmanship, Finland and the Netherlands for your support to this event. I very much look forward to our discussions.

Thank you.