



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, the Right Honorable Baroness Anelay, on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 21, 2016

The United States would like to express gratitude to Baroness Anelay for her candid and comprehensive remarks. The United States stands with you and your government, and we thank you for your efforts as a global leader in fighting the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence. Thank you for your concrete suggestions about ways in which we can take this important effort forward at the OSCE – too few of our guest speakers offer us specific ideas about how to move forward, and so we thank you for those.

Preventing sexual violence in armed conflict is a matter of international peace and security. Sexual violence fuels conflict, forces people to flee their homes and countries, and is often linked to cyclical violence and other abuses. Impunity underwrites conflict and instability for years. We should strengthen the framework for accountability to send a clear message that anyone who chooses to resort to such brutal tactics should be brought to justice, and we should also ensure survivors have access to the services they need to heal and reintegrate.

We need to challenge the idea that sexual violence in conflict is solely an issue for the gender equality advocacy or law enforcement communities to address. Research shows that places with high rates of gender inequality are also more likely to experience conflict – a point President Obama recently made when he commented, “I have seen how the ideology that leads Boko Haram to kidnap schoolgirls, and leads ISIL to enslave and rape women is the same ideology that leads to instability, and violence, and terrorism.”

Unfortunately, sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence during conflict have also occurred in the OSCE region. Rape, as Minister Anelay mentioned, was used as a tactic during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although that was more than 20 years ago, survivors continue to face obstacles to justice and are still healing from their trauma. The United States has welcomed two landmark rulings by courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina that convicted some perpetrators and ordered them to pay compensation to the survivors. We urge authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina at all levels to ensure that all cases – including those involving women raped by rank-and-file soldiers – move forward as expeditiously as possible. We welcome the adoption of legislation in Croatia recognizing that rape can be a war crime and providing assistance and compensation to war rape survivors – including men and women alike – through free counseling, legal and medical aid, and economic support. In countries across Europe, the arrival of over a million asylum seekers since 2015 continues to

underline the urgent need to take steps to reduce exposure of all individuals to the risk of gender-based violence, including in reception facilities, provision of services as well as improving access to response mechanisms.

There is still much to be done. The United States remains committed to strengthening efforts to protect all people from harm, exploitation, discrimination, abuse, gender-based violence, and human trafficking, and we should hold perpetrators accountable – especially in conflict-affected environments. We have committed nearly \$40 million for support to survivors of sexual violence in conflict. In Nigeria, for example, the United States supports UN agencies, community groups, and local non-governmental organizations that provide health care services, including appropriate psychosocial counseling for women and children. In 2014, Secretary Kerry launched the Accountability Initiative, an effort to promote innovative justice sector solutions for sexual violence crimes in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Liberia.

However, supporting survivors and promoting justice is only part of the solution. To end sexual violence in conflict, women must have a seat at the table in resolving conflicts. Empowered women provide powerful antidotes to counter violent extremism and have critical contributions to make at every level of our struggle against violence, inequality, and especially sexual violence in conflict. We also need women in law enforcement to rebuild trust between police and communities; women corrections officers and counselors to reach out to women inmates who are on the path to radicalization to violence; and women legislators to support more inclusive public policies that address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

Preventing this form of violence requires the full and active participation of everyone, women and men, in building an inclusive peace. After all, the best protection from sexual violence in conflict that targets women and girls is a society in which women and girls are respected and have equal access to justice, educational opportunities and health care services; a society in which women enjoy equal protection under the law and equal access to the political space.

As Secretary Kerry has said many times, the use of rape as a tactic of war must stop. We urge all participating States to step up efforts to hold accountable perpetrators of this heinous crime and to offer survivors the support they so justly deserve. With coordinated and concerted action on both the international and domestic levels, we can begin to eliminate sexual violence in conflict. Even just acknowledging sexual violence in conflict against women and girls as well as men and boys is a significant first step.

Thank you again, Minister, and thank you Mr. Chair.