



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Response to the Address by the CIO Special Representative on Gender Equality, Liliana Palihovici**

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
July 21, 2022

Special Representative Palihovici, welcome back to the Permanent Council and thank you for your insightful address and recommendations today. Actions to advance the *Women, Peace, and Security* agenda and to promote gender equality are urgently needed across the entire OSCE region, we agree with you.

Russia's barbaric war against Ukraine has caused unimaginable suffering, including for the women and children who are killed, injured, or orphaned by shells striking homes, shopping centers, schools or other civilian structures, or who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. So in response to the previous intervention, I would say if you want to talk about upholding principles and commitments probably the first place to start would be with *stop killing women* and then we can discuss from there. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) reports over 1,500 women and children have been killed or injured, while UNHCR reports over 8.8 million people – over 90% of whom are women – have been forced to flee their country, Ukraine, in search of safety.

As the Secretary General noted, wars are never gender neutral, nor are they gender blind. Russia's brutal full-scale invasion of its neighbor is no exception. The *OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine* thematic report in September 2021 described the specific security challenges faced by women particularly in the Donbas. Since Russia unleashed its all-out attack in February 2022, there is emerging evidence that untold numbers of women and girls have endured sexual exploitation and abuse and other forms of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence at the hands of Russia's soldiers.

The April 13, 2022 report by the *Moscow Mechanism* mission of experts provides initial evidence that women and girls are disproportionately subjected to human trafficking, forced prostitution, rape, and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence. Only a few weeks into the conflict, reports of rape surfaced, such as the account of a Russian soldier drunkenly raping a woman in her house and in front of her child in Bovary, near Kyiv. More recently, UNOHCHR has verified 23 cases of conflict-related sexual violence against both women and men.

Russia's denial of responsibility does not make gender-based violence go away. Nor does denial relieve members of Russia's forces of being held accountable for these heinous crimes. We applaud Ukraine's efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, including through their ratification of the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, better known as the *Istanbul Convention*. This will give added momentum to Ukraine's efforts to bring justice to the survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

Mr. Chair, Ukrainian women are also on the frontlines supporting communities and countering Russia's war of aggression. Women comprise around 15 percent of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and substantially contribute to Territorial Defense Forces defending their homeland against Russia's invading and marauding army. Yuliia Paievska, known in Ukraine as Taira, is one such woman. Serving as a medic with her team, known as Taira's Angels, in besieged Mariupol, Taira filmed hundreds of hours of footage from a body camera of battlefield surgeries that bore witness to the horrors of Mariupol. Captured by Russia's forces in March and falsely accused of being an "ultra-nationalist," Taira was thankfully released in June.

As Ukraine seeks to heal the wounds and rebuild after the carnage brought on by Russia's unprovoked attack and the ensuing humanitarian crisis, women must be part of the solution as leaders, decision-makers, entrepreneurs, caregivers, de-miners, and relief workers. The OSCE is already making an important contribution, not least by training women mediators to deliver much needed humanitarian relief through the *WIN Extra-budgetary project*. The *OSCE Mission to Moldova* is supporting local partners to provide services to survivors of sexual violence, as you mentioned, amongst the women refugees from Ukraine. The United States is proud to support both these projects and encourages other delegations to do the same.

Ms. Palihovici, we greatly value your efforts to bring these issues to the attention of the Permanent Council and thank you very much for your work.

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