

**Experts' Seminar on Innovative Approaches to Combating Violence against Women
Dushanbe, 20-22 October 2008**

**Opening remarks by Ambassador (Human Rights and Democracy) Kari Kahiluoto,
Finland**

It is my great pleasure to represent the Chairmanship-in-Office at this occasion we deem very timely and important in my home-country Finland. Violence against women continues to be, regrettably, sadly and unacceptably so, an increasing problem around the world, including within the OSCE area.

Violence against women is not a domestic or private issue, but an issue that effects societies and security in a broad sense. No society is immune to the effects of violence against women.

Starting from the big picture of our **international normative commitments**, in particular under the **CEDAW** (Convention Against All Forms of Violence Against Women) and later related deliberations within the United Nations, it is hard to question the **human rights nature of violence against women**. This is, gender-based violence or domestic violence is **not a private matter** but a societal issue. On the one hand, here I refer to the **responsibility of states to take action and protect all of its citizens** from human rights violations. On the other hand, I refer to **the broader requirement of positive action to promote gender equality** –the lack of which is often a root-cause of gender-based violence against women and girls.

Within the OSCE, we are bound by different political commitments undertaken. The **Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality**, adopted by decision number 14/04 in December 2004, gives various tasking to different OSCE structures, we have also the jointly agreed **Ministerial Council Decision number 15/2005 (paragraph 44c) specifically on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women**. Thus, we have a **framework and moral imperative** for enhancing our efforts in legislative, policy and program work on violence against women.

As CiO Finland is satisfied that this issue is gaining more attention in the work and agenda of the OSCE.

One of the Finnish Chairmanship principles has been the **underlining of the cross-dimensional nature** of gender issues across the traditional pillars of the OSCE. This is, also violence against women is **not strictly speaking only a human dimension issue** but relates to the politico-military dimension (women in conflict situations, proliferation of SALWS, policing) as well as to the economic dimension, talking about the huge financial cost of violence against women in addition to the human cost. So, the broad challenge of

violence against women can be tackled only by **comprehensive and integrated responses**.

Another important Chairmanship principle I need to take up is the one of **coordination and coherence**. Acknowledging the great efforts taken within the Council of Europe Campaign against Domestic Violence, I find the **complementary nature** of this seminar, **also in geographic terms**, a crucial one. It is wisdom to **build upon the existing knowledge and experiences**. Hereby I also wish to emphasize the importance of **maximizing synergies within the OSCE**, while commending the work of the OSCE Gender section, as well that of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

In terms of substance, let me stress the fact that gender equality in numbers only does not necessarily and unavoidably convert into violence-free quality of life for citizens of OSCE Member States, at least in the short run. As Finland pointed out in the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) gender session last year in her national intervention, **even women's' outstanding participation in government and politics has not prevented relatively sad records in violence against women**.

This is the case in Finland and we recognize the need to adopt intensified, targeted measures to address and eliminate violence against women. This was also the clear message we received both in the context of our UN Human Rights Council **Universal Periodic Review (UPR) assessment** in the beginning of the year in Geneva and in the context of our **CEDAW hearing** in New York in July.

Indeed, we are all here in Dushanbe in order to **learn from each other**. Nobody is perfect in human rights and **we all need serious efforts in order to do better**: this should be our firm collective determination.

With reference to learning, it is worth stressing the instrumental role a **well coordinated and planned multiprofessional and cross-disciplinary research** on gender-based violence can play, if fully exploited and used, as appropriate, for operational purposes. **Here I wish to note the work done by the Geneva-based DCAF research center (Democratic Control of the Armed Forces) and its publication Women in an Insecure World. A documentary film based on the research of DCAF will conclude this seminar.**

Finally, Mr. /Madame Chair let me conclude by wishing that the deliberations in this seminar will help and guide us forward in our efforts both at the OSCE and at the national level. Even if we know that prevailing attitudes seem to change “too slowly”, we need to **perform our role as catalysts for change as an urgent mission of highest importance**.