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United States Mission to the OSCE
U.S. Statement for the
Forum for Security Cooperation – Permanent Council:
Security Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
March 8, 2023

Thank you, Chair,

And thank you Madam Secretary General, dear Helga, for your leadership and commitment to advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. Your leadership on this issue is inspiring. And thank you to our distinguished panel of experts for sharing your insights with us today. I'd especially like to thank my colleague, Deputy Assistant Secretary Matt Steinhelfer for coming all the way from Washington, D.C. to highlight the importance the United States places on the WPS agenda in the OSCE region and around the world.

Too often, even in the context of the WPS agenda, women are primarily viewed as victims who need protecting. Yet, we have witnessed time and again during Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine how women have risen as effective agents of peace and security when they are full, equal, and meaningful participants in diplomacy, in the security services, and in crisis response. Many of the immediate first responders in the early days of Russia's renewed full-scale invasion of Ukraine were local, women-led organizations and initiatives. The women of Ukraine assisted in evacuating vulnerable individuals and distributed medical supplies and food, often with their own resources, risking their own lives. We applaud heroes like Yuliia Paievskia, known as "Taira," who demonstrated extraordinary moral and physical courage in defending Ukraine against relentless Russian aggression by providing frontline medical training in the Donbas, documenting Russia's war crimes in Mariupol, evacuating women and children from that same city, and then bravely enduring torture at the hands of her Kremlin-backed captors.

Women have broken-down decades-long social barriers and are now performing combat roles in the Armed Forces of Ukraine; more than 60,000 servicewomen, as we just heard from our Ukrainian panelist, are fighting on the front lines. Women like Dr. Olha Bihar went from being a lawyer working on her

PhD to leading a mortar platoon, defending Bakhmut, where she is bravely fighting today as we speak. Ukrainian women are not victims merely surviving Russia's brutal onslaught. They are leading and championing their country's cause as agents of peace and security. Today, more women serve in decision-making roles in Ukraine's government than ever before. Under their stewardship and commitment to democracy, human rights, and freedom, Ukraine has mounted such a staunch defense of its democracy against brutal Russian aggression. And it is women who will continue to play a crucial role in Ukraine's rebuilding and recovery as both leaders and implementers of peace and security.

Research shows that women's equal participation in relief and recovery is associated both with higher chances of attaining peace and longer lasting peace agreements because more inclusive approaches generate wiser and more widely acceptable outcomes. Yet despite the research and in contrast to the positive, real-world examples in Ukraine, women globally continue to face resistance to meaningful inclusion on decision-making in early warning, conflict prevention, response, resolution, and recovery. While we are encouraged by creative solutions and strategy-sharing among women to develop policy proposals, create back-channel negotiations, build coalitions, and establish channels of donor funding and support for their efforts, more must be done to include women in formal processes and to make those processes more inclusive. Where we clearly need more improvement is in the inclusion of women in mediation in leadership roles in the OSCE and other international organizations, as has been said. Again, this is not about "doing a favor" for women – this is to make better policy and improve outcomes for all.

Mr. Chairs,

When we speak about Women, Peace and Security I would be remiss not to talk about gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, in Ukraine and elsewhere. We have hundreds of documented cases of members of Russia's forces raping and brutalizing Ukrainians – of all ages and genders. Women, girls, and gender-diverse persons bear the brunt of these abhorrent crimes. Sadly, we do not yet know the true scale of these crimes because harmful social stigma and a lack of trust in institution capacity prevents survivors from coming forward. International efforts, such as the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism reports and the Independent Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, are shining a light

on Russia's use of rape in this war, while employing a survivor-centered and trauma-informed approach to reporting on these horrific crimes. The UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine detailed the depravity with which Russian forces used sexual violence as an integral part of their attempt to subjugate Ukraine. The report reveals that sexual violence is a premeditated, systematic, criminal tactic used by Russia's forces in Ukraine. These are crimes for which there will be accountability, not only for those who carried out the violence, but for those who schemed and ordered it. Ukraine is admirably trying to hold the perpetrators accountable and already the first trials have taken place.

There will be doubters, and those who wish to maintain the status quo and can see women only as victims, caretakers, or the subject of, quote, "special interests." Those, like the Russian Federation, which insisted during the last Security Dialogue on this topic that WPS has, quote, "no bearing whatsoever on the politico-military situation in Europe," end quote. We may hear similar sentiments here today. Such countries that denigrate the value of involving half of their own populations in all aspects of peace and security will inevitably be diminished by their own obtuse policies, and the stability and security of their own countries will suffer as a result. Unfortunately, the instability bred by non-inclusive, gender-lopsided policies rarely stays within the borders of those states. Those who support WPS must do everything we can to bolster the stability of our own democracies through the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women. By doing so, we can act as a bulwark against the politico-military instability that is spread by countries like Russia and Belarus in order to ensure peace and stability in our region. As the Secretary General said, we all have a role to play.

Thank you very much.