

The 1060th Meeting of the
Forum for Security Co-Operation

“Women, Peace and Security”

Delivered by Ambassador Neil Holland, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the OSCE and Chair of the Men for Gender Equality Network, at the Forum for Security Co-Operation, 25 October 2023.

Madame Chair,
Distinguished panellists,
Dear colleagues,

I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Cyprus as well as three informal networks: the Women Ambassadors to the OSCE of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Estonia, the European Union, France, Georgia, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Malta, Moldova, Norway, San Marino, Slovenia, Sweden, and Türkiye, as well as members of the OSCE Men for Gender Equality network, and members of the Women in the First-Dimension network.

I would like to commend the Canadian FSC Chair for placing Women, Peace, and Security where it belongs: at the top of our agenda.

Madame Chair,

As our distinguished panellists have so insightfully reflected upon today, integrating gender perspectives into military planning, and promoting women’s participation in the military are critical aspects of the WPS agenda. These issues are, by extension, pivotal to advancing peace and stability in the OSCE region.

The international community has long recognized the significance of incorporating gender perspectives in military affairs, including peace operations. Understanding and integrating these perspectives is essential in addressing the unique ways conflict affects individuals based on their gender. Gender considerations are vital from the onset of conflict, continuing through to the resolution, peacebuilding, and post-conflict stages. By mainstreaming gender in military, political, humanitarian, and diplomatic planning, we can respond more effectively to these realities, leading to improved outcomes during and following conflict.

Including a gender perspective also encompasses addressing the underrepresentation of women in the security sector, particularly in leadership positions. We *must* ensure that militaries, including their leaders, reflect the communities they serve. Women’s meaningful inclusion in security forces ensures a greater diversity of views, which is linked to greater innovation and effectiveness within any organization. It is also well-established that women’s participation in peace operations leads to more effective peacekeeping.

The path to realizing this goal is self-evident. In order to break down the institutional, and social barriers to women's participation in the military, we must change attitudes, and we must change norms. Achieving women's meaningful participation in the security forces requires a *transformative* change in how we think about, and how we approach gender mainstreaming. Yet, this can only be achieved by engaging men. Only together can we build a more equal world. It is critical that men understand the value of the WPS Agenda, and the fundamental connection between gender equality, and peace and security.

This work starts in our organizations: in our defence and security structures, in our ministries, and in the OSCE. We would, in this regard, like to draw your attention to the Barbershop workshop, which will take place next week on the 31st of October in the Hofburg. This event aims to engage men in promoting gender equality, while also increasing their understanding of the WPS agenda, and its role in promoting international peace and security.

The OSCE, as a regional security organization, has – and will continue to – play a crucial role in implementing the WPS agenda, particularly when it comes to supporting the implementation of the many National Action Plans (NAPs) on 1325. A prime example of this is the OSCE's collaboration with Uzbekistan, which culminated in the endorsement of the National Action Plan in 2022. This clearly shows that partnerships can play a significant role in the development of NAPs, as well as strategies for their implementation. To further advance the implementation of the WPS Agenda, it is crucial that we draw our attention to efforts to increase monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Since Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian government has updated its National Action Plan to reflect the reality of Russia's aggression. Ukrainian women have been indispensable in courageously defending their country's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence, as well as in rebuilding their country's future. Undertaking efforts to revise its National Action Plan during wartime demonstrates not only the commitment of Ukraine to the 1325 agenda, but also the crucial role of the WPS agenda in responding to the gendered dimensions of conflict.

Madame Chair,

Allow me to emphasise that we cannot solve today's global challenges without women – not without women soldiers, police officers, human rights defenders, and not without women peacebuilders. Nor can we attain gender equality without the support, engagement, and accountability of men. We must remember that gender equality is not to the benefit of *some*, but to the shared benefit of *all*.

In closing, we underline our commitment to sustained efforts towards our shared goals of ensuring the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women, including in all activities of the OSCE. Together, we stand for the human rights, safety, empowerment and leadership of women and girls. We stand for accountability, and respect for international law, and our shared OSCE principles and commitments.

Thank you.