

Working session 15: Tolerance and non-discrimination II (continued), including

- **ensuring equal opportunity for women and men in all spheres of life,**
- **implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality**
- **prevention of violence against women**

Rapporteur: William Ekås Sæter, First Secretary, Permanent Delegation of Norway to the OSCE

The first introducer, Ambassador Melanne Verwee, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender, stated on video that gender equality is of special importance in the human dimension of security. Gender equality leads to progress for all and is a key part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Amb. Verwee specifically noted the Women, Peace and Security Index developed jointly by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and the Peace Research Institute, Oslo.

Amb. Verwee expressed concern for pushback against the Istanbul Convention due to its usage of the term gender. The opponents of the term have fielded unfounded criticism and misrepresented gender equality. Violence against women, and its manifestation in domestic violence, is not a private matter, neither traditional nor cultural, but criminal. In societies in which the lack of rule of law allows impunity for such crimes, there is greater tolerance for violence in general. In order to counter such violence, Amb. Verwee held that men's participation is necessary, and that men must take part to address inequality as stakeholders and co-beneficiaries.

The second introducer, Ms Gordana Čomić, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Serbia, noted the innovation that is female participation in politics, a domain from which women were previously excluded. However, even though the participation of women in politics now is a legal right in many states, the realisation of this right can still be difficult. Ms. Čomić specifically emphasised the experience of women in Serbia. She noted the importance of women politicians as agents of change and how the OSCE and ODIHR are indispensable for revitalising the discourse of human rights.

Drawing on experience from Serbia, Ms. Čomić argued that some issues relevant for women go above and beyond party lines. Among these are violence against women, representation of women in public bodies, female entrepreneurship, health care, and grassroots organisation. The assistance of OSCE field operations has been important in addressing these issues.

Ms. Čomić also warned of the dangers of populism: a force that brings not harmony, but nightmarish images of enemies and fear. Women politicians must draw on the expertise of the OSCE and ODIHR in order to combat injustice, intolerance and populism in order to change our societies for the better.

The third introducer, Dr. Henri Myrtilinen, Head of Gender and Peacebuilding at International Alert, opened by stressing the importance of a comprehensive approach to prevent and counter gender based violence. It is necessary to look at specific vulnerabilities and the root causes that drive perpetrators to violence. Among these are gendered expectations and norms. Moreover, gender intersects with socioeconomic conditions to create risks. As an example, Dr. Myrtilinen explained how controlling behaviour from men is not caused only by male thoughts on how men are to behave, but from behavioural expectations from other men and women around them. These expectations are in part determined by social and economic conditions. To complicate matters, there is not always a clear cut line between survivors and perpetrators.

On violence against women in conflict, Dr. Myrtilinen noted that such violence is an exacerbation of pre-existing violence in peacetime. Specifically concerning has been the rise of new types of violence, such as online misogyny and trolling, transcending the borders of the online sphere. There have been some recent horrific cases of violence with roots in online misogyny, such as mass shootings in Canada and Finland and the killing of British Member of Parliament Joanne Cox.

On a positive note, Dr. Myrtilinen noted that much good work is being done towards preventing violence against women. He took specific note of work in the Western-Balkans on toxic masculinities, and in Tajikistan on changing gender dynamics through life skills training, economic empowerment and income-generating activities.

Many participating States spoke about the advances within their own domestic situation, including adoption of national legislation, ratification or signature of the Istanbul Convention, support to survivors of gender based violence, including practical measures such as helplines and shelters. Others reported on increased participation of women in politics and public life. In some participating the states, the Istanbul Convention was reported to recently have entered into force.

Several participating States held that gender equality has significant importance and is at the core of values of more than half of participating States. In order to address gender equality in the OSCE region, several participating states called for the full implementation of the OSCE Gender Action Plan. Some participating States also called for an update of the plan.

Several speakers spoke on the specific situations of women in several participating States. Some participating States congratulated other participating States on advances towards gender equality, but also expressed concern about backsliding in others.

One speaker expressed concern about the laws governing child protection services in one participating State and noted similar worries in others. Another speaker noted the specific

situation of male, female and transgender sex workers in some participating States, including violence perpetrated by law enforcement.

More than one speaker drew attention to the issue of the amendment to legislation of one participating State that decriminalized domestic violence. In responding, the participating State claimed that the law is positive for society and that administrative action may be taken to counter such behaviour.

Multiple speakers noted the intersections forms of discrimination experienced by some groups, including groups such as the LGBTIQ and the disabled. They called on participating States to address intersecting and double discrimination through legislative and practical measures.

Several speakers noted the importance of civil society to address gender equality. One speaker drew on the experience of a women's network in one participating State and recommended that similar networks be established in others. Other speakers called on stakeholders to avail themselves of the expertise of the OSCE and ODIHR.

One speaker expressed concern about international standards for sex education and the sex education curriculum in one participating State. In exercising its right of reply, the state in question indicated that the speaker's representation of the curriculum was inaccurate and that sex education has legitimate public health interest.

An international organisation explained that the aim of the Istanbul Convention is only to combat violence against women. Concern was also expressed for a widening gap between the rights afforded women and the implementation of these rights.

One national human rights institution (NHRI) emphasised the importance of national equality bodies and called on participating States to establish such bodies. Another NHRI reported on its mandate and on recommendations it has issued.

One media institution expressed concern that gender equality does not build a positive culture, while another devoted its intervention to the rights of the child.

In exercising their right of reply, participating States responded to specific criticisms directed at them and expressed gratitude for the recommendations offered. One participating State expressed dissatisfaction with interventions that were off-topic.

In wrapping up the discussion, Dr. Myrtilinen was pleased to have heard many examples of mechanisms to prevent violence against women. He expressed his gratitude to civil society for doing important work and for highlighting the specific vulnerabilities of certain groups. Ms.

Čomić indicated that there is a lack of mainstreaming of human rights in our societies and thanked the OSCE and ODIHR for their persistent defense of human rights. In countering the forces of intolerance, xenophobia and populism, Ms. Čomić recalled the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Non-exhaustive list of recommendations

to participating States:

- OSCE institutions and participating States should double efforts towards the achievement of gender equality;
- OSCE institutions and participating States adopt an OSCE Action Plan on Combatting Violence Against Women;
- OSCE institutions and participating States should focus more concretely on implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, most notably but not exclusively in the First Dimension, including through the adoption of OSCE-wide Action Plan on implementation of UNSC resolution 1325;
- OSCE institutions and participating States should elaborate the OSCE's gender markers system, compliant with OECD DAC standards in this regard as a central component of the Secretary General's annual report on gender equality, which should be shared with participating States to ensure full accountability and an effective reporting regime;
- OSCE participating States should find their own solution to the universal problem of sexual violence or any other form of harassment;
- Participating States, which are currently involved in conflict mediation, should ensure that women take an active role in the development of peace settlements in keeping with UNSCR 1325;
- The OSCE participating States take meaningful action to implement the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and to fulfil MC Decision 8/14 to elaborate an addendum to the Gender Action Plan;
- The OSCE participating States should reach an agreement in Milan on an OSCE MC Decision on Combating Violence against Women;
- The OSCE participating States recognize the pervasive and disproportionate abuse, harassment, and violence women face online, and that this recognition is followed by the adoption of policies and programs to address this serious human rights issue;
- The OSCE participating States fully recognize the relevance and benefits to our collective security of women's full participation in all decision making processes and that UN resolutions on Women, Peace and Security are reflected in OSCE decision and commitments;
- The OSCE participating States should partner with domestic and international civil society organizations to address systemic barriers that drive discrimination against women and girls;
- All participating States should fully implement our OSCE commitments with regard and furthermore ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence;
- The OSCE participating States need to pay particular attention to mobilizing men and boys in order to shift social norms and transform social roles towards greater equality;

- OSCE participating States should strengthen gender mainstreamed approach to emerging challenges by focusing strongly on prevention of violence and development of peaceful resolution skills from very early age; redevelop, foster and spread the culture of tolerance, mutual understanding, cooperation, inclusion and promotion of non-aggressive standards of living;
- OSCE participating States should advance efforts within the Organization to use adequate and clear language regarding “gender equality” which complies within the common, ordinary and generally accepted understanding of the expression;
- OSCE participating States should provide inclusive education to women with disabilities, address the lack of access to health care to women with disabilities in conflict zones and promote the inclusion of women with disabilities in political and public life;
- OSCE participating States to respect national independence and stop applying gender politics to interfere in national affairs;
- Participating States should reconsider sexual education programmes for children;
- Governments, who have not implemented UN Committee’s recommendations, should decriminalize sex work, terminate police raids and forcibly testing on HIV and sexually transmitted infections and introduce mechanisms for monitoring violence against sex workers by the police. Also make decisions and develop laws related to sex workers and their meaningful participation.

To OSCE Executive Structures and others

- OSCE should assist the participating States in fulfilling gender equality and eliminate violence against all groups of women, including sex workers;
- ODIHR in its next publication on violence against women, should devote particular attention to the harmful impact that today’s hyper-sexualized culture has on women, especially young women and girls;
- ODIHR and the OSCE Gender Section should solicit best practices from around the OSCE region and assist participating States in implementation of such best practices regarding women’s equal participation in public and political life and eliminating violence against women;
- ODIHR should continue supporting women’s networks which is a very important tool in promoting gender equality. Especially this applies to countries where women’s rights are being increasingly restricted;
- Measures should be taken to combat violence against women.