

**Nordic-Baltic Statement in response to the presentation of the Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the OSCE Gender Action Plan**

As delivered by Ambassador Anne-Kirsti Karlsen at the Permanent Council, Vienna, 11 July 2024

Thank you, Madame Chair,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries, as well as Canada and Liechtenstein.

We thank Secretary General Helga Schmid, for presenting this year's Annual Progress Report on Gender Equality to the Permanent Council.

Twenty years have now passed since the adoption of the OSCE Gender Action Plan. We appreciate the substantial work done for gender mainstreaming within the OSCE and promoting women's equality around the region.

Madame Chair,

Today, as we are faced with a serious backlash against women's rights, rising authoritarianism, and democratic backsliding, it is ever more important that we redouble our efforts to reverse these worrying trends and deliver on our commitment to gender equality.

It is essential to push back against regressive voices seeking to unravel decades of progress on gender equality and women's rights and fundamental freedoms.

Gender equality is a human right, and it is our commitment. Without gender equality, there can be no lasting peace, no comprehensive security, and no true democracy. Women, in all their diversity, are willing, able, and entitled to full, equal, effective and meaningful participation in all areas where decisions of security are made.

Madame Chair,

The OSCE continues to be a valuable platform for all participating States to cooperate on realizing our commitment to achieving gender equality. We welcome the first OSCE Central Asian workshop on National Action Plans for Women, Peace, and Security two weeks back. We would like to thank the Secretariat and the US delegation for your efforts in making that workshop a reality. It's a good example of the added value the OSCE provides to the security sector, by bringing together experts from across the region for a very practical discussion on gender.

Promoting gender equality in peacetime is difficult enough. In times of war, it is even more challenging. The WIN project's efforts to empower women in Ukraine have proven highly

valuable. We strongly support Ukraine in its inclusion of women in all parts of society and military and commend Ukraine's commitment to advancing gender equality while defending itself against Russia's illegal war of aggression. A war in which sexual and gender-based violence has been a constant and appalling feature.

Madame Chair,

Allow us to make two remarks about the status of gender equality in our organization.

First, while gender parity is a step in the right direction, it is not just a numbers game. Gender perspectives must be mainstreamed throughout all work of our organization and both men and women are responsible for keeping it on the agenda. Nevertheless, your report shows that we must do better to ensure equal representation of women in senior management positions. This should be the bare minimum. We, the participating States must put forward women candidates to leadership positions in the OSCE. For example, after the Head of Mission to Montenegro concludes her assignment, only one woman is left holding the position as Head of Mission.

Second, the 20 anniversary of the Action Plan is the right time to take stock of the developments thus far and take more informed steps going forward. Much has happened since 2004, and an updated action plan is needed. We look forward to discussing this further at the Chairpersonship's Gender Conference in September. In this vein, we welcome in particular the intention to take an intersectional approach to gender equality in OSCE interventions.

Madame chair,

As the security sector is a male-dominated field, the OSCE could be used even more effectively to engage men in gender equality work. Everyone has a role to play in advancing gender equality within the security and military space and beyond. There are many social limitations for men which often go unaddressed, and men are also the often the main perpetrators of violence. For both of these reasons, men's championship for gender equality is therefore crucial for substantial change in our region. In this regard, we would like to highlight the Barbershop concept and conference as a valuable tool. We support plans to discuss the role of men in promoting gender equality at the upcoming Chairpersonship's Warsaw Human Dimension Conference this fall.

Madame Chair,

We strive for a gender-transformative approach and an ambitious gender policy in the OSCE. One that conquers traditional and harmful gender norms which limit the freedom and opportunity of those wishing to contribute to the safety and security of our region.

Thank you.