

**Statement by the Women Ambassadors and Representatives of the OSCE, to the Permanent Council, on 10 March 2022 on the occasion of the International Women's Day.**

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the Women Ambassadors and Representatives of the OSCE – Albania, Andorra, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Malta, Moldova, Norway, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey and EU delegation.

We represent diverse countries of different sizes, from East to West and North to South of Vienna, all with our own national positions but with a common purpose. Today and every day we stand united in our call for inclusive security and for gender equality.

Given the current circumstances, our contribution today will not be focusing on the IWD theme for 2022 which is “Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow”. This is a maxim with which we concur but given the fragility of the current circumstances, today we will focus on women and conflicts.

Women ambassadors and representatives deplore in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in violation of article 2 (4) of the UN Charter. We also echo the call from the UN GA resolution demanding the Russian Federation to immediately, completely, and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. This act of aggression in the heart of Europe is not only an attack against Ukraine, but on the entire European and global security order.

Women are active agents of peace in armed conflict, yet their role as key players and change agents of peace has been largely

unrecognized. We acknowledge and are committed to integrating the different understanding, and experiences of women into all aspects of OSCE efforts. This approach is essential to successfully enable comprehensive security and sustaining peace. That is why this organization needs to continue implementing the women, peace, and security agenda. It is more relevant than ever, in light of the hostilities in Ukraine.

It is well known that violent conflict carries a different set of risks affecting women and girls and intensifies pre-existing gender inequalities and discrimination. Women and children, especially those displaced, are also particularly vulnerable during situations of displacement. The need for the establishment of humanitarian corridors, as well as protection and the safe passage for civilians through local ceasefires is urgent.

Women are always at risk of gender-based violence (GBV) perpetrated by armed groups. Although GBV has not so far appeared to be systematically or widely used as a weapon of war in the ongoing aggression against Ukraine, we must follow this issue closely, especially since instances of GBV are often underreported.

We are deeply disturbed by the rising number of reports about the use of rape as a weapon and means of controlling the civilian population used by Russian soldiers in Ukraine. These accusations must be properly investigated, women and girls' rights upheld at all times, and accountability for any violation or abuse of rights guaranteed.

We observe large numbers of people leaving Ukraine but also fleeing within the country. Women and girls living in conflict zones, as well as IDPs, are under severe risk of resorting to 'survival sex' as a means of providing basic needs for their families. It increases the risk of being exposed to sexual violence and trafficking.

Human trafficking, including trafficking of women for sexual exploitation, is endemic and has been exacerbated by the conflict

in and around Ukraine. It increased after 2014, and we should expect that this pattern will continue. Ukrainian victims have been subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. Already last week there were repeated reports about locally organized gangs on the Ukrainian borders trying to entice women with children to join trafficking. We cannot stand by and watch while this war results in exploitation of women, by forcing them into prostitution and other devastating destinies.

We reiterate our commitment to the OSCE core principles and values, as enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris and the Istanbul Document. Translating these commitments into action is not an easy task, but it is the basis for accomplishing comprehensive security. Ensuring the implementation of these documents remains and must be held central on the agenda of the OSCE and continues to be a key objective.

Mr. Chairperson,

To realize the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security we must include women and women's perspective on security.

To this end, Women ambassadors and representatives call for the following:

1. An immediate ceasefire, cessation of all hostilities, and adherence with international humanitarian law;
2. As soon as possible, initiation of a peace process which ensures the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, youth, and other historically marginalized communities at all stages of negotiations;
3. Accountability for human rights violations through gender-responsive monitoring and accountability mechanisms led by international actors, including the OSCE; and

4. Integration of key provisions of the Women, Peace, and Security resolutions into all programs and security initiatives in response to the conflict in Ukraine.

The OSCE and all of us have a role and responsibility to contribute to bringing an end to the human suffering that we see in our region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I would request to have this statement added to the journal of the day.