



Permanent Delegation of Finland to the OSCE

**Joint Statement by Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden**

**OSCE Permanent Council 21.7.2022**

**The OSCE 2021 Annual Progress Report on Gender Equality**

Thank you Mr. Chair,

I would like to make the following statement on behalf of Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden as well as my own country Finland.

While we fully align with the statement of the European Union, we would like to make the following additional remarks in our national capacities.

We thank the Secretary General for presenting the Annual Progress Report on Gender Equality.

Gender equality remains a pressing challenge across the OSCE region. For far too many women and girls in our region, the right to **peace, security and a life free from violence and discrimination is not a reality**.

As we heard earlier today, Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine continues to have a devastating impact on the security of women and girls. Crises and conflicts also deepen pre-existing gender gaps. Destruction of livelihoods and educational opportunities affect women and girls disproportionately.

The two Moscow Mechanism reports presented to the Permanent Council this year highlight how Russian troops have, among other things, weaponized sexual and gender-based violence in its warfare.

**We condemn these repulsive actions in the strongest possible terms.** The deliberate use of sexual and gender-based violence is a clear violation of the Geneva Conventions that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. There will be no impunity for these crimes.

In the OSCE, all participating States have committed to combat all forms of violence against women and girls. No woman or girl should end up as a victim of sexual or gender-based violence, human trafficking or any other inhumane or degrading treatment.

Women are not only victims and caretakers. We are in awe of the strong, swift and resilient response by Ukrainian civil society to Russia's invasion. Women have taken the responsibility to lead this movement.

Civil society activists, volunteers and organizers are sustaining their communities, documenting war crimes, and have a central role to play in building a peaceful and sustainable future. The OSCE and its participating States should do all they can to support these brave individuals.

Mr Chair,

We strongly believe the OSCE could and should do more to implement and mainstream the Women Peace and Security agenda.

It is difficult to imagine a context more relevant for the Women, Peace and Security agenda than the OSCE – a regional security organization with a mandate to advance comprehensive security.

In this regard, we warmly welcome the OSCE Networking Platform for Women Leaders launched by you, Madame Secretary General, earlier this year.

Women's full equal and meaningful participation in all phases of conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding is not just a question of gender equality. It is also about getting better results.

It is impossible to achieve lasting peace in a society if you exclude half of society from the process. Amplifying women's voices and making sure women are in decision-making and leadership roles is therefore not only the right thing, but also the smart thing to do.

Madame Secretary General,

We welcome the fact that all the OSCE executive bodies have a gender equality plan in place. However, your report shows that work remains to be done within the OSCE.

Our OSCE field missions provide a lot of the hands-on, practical value of the OSCE. Mainstreaming gender equality in all field mission activities is therefore necessary in order to achieve progress. Providing more staff resources to this end is an important practical step and a clear signal from the leadership of the organization.

In this context, we also want to call upon all the participating States to nominate more women to senior seconded posts within the organization.

Mr Chair,

Our OSCE commitments are based on the notion that human rights and fundamental freedoms are a constitutive element of our common security order. This means that participating States have acknowledged the linkages between peace and prosperity on the one hand, and equal, diverse and inclusive societies on the other.

Human rights are indivisible and universal. They are essential to the well-being of individuals, families and all of society. This includes sexual and reproductive health and rights. Participating States should use all possible means to defend these rights. Women and girls in all their diversity must be fully in control of their bodies.

In the same vein, the full realization of the human rights of LGBT+ persons is not a question of privileges or ideology. It's simply about eliminating discrimination so that everyone's human rights are fully and equally protected.

Once more, we call upon all of us to step up efforts to bolster gender perspectives in every aspect of OSCE's work.

Our common security will be better off for it.