



ADDRESS BY

DR. HEDY FRY

**SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON GENDER ISSUES
TO THE OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

13TH WINTER MEETING

13-14 FEBRUARY 2014

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

President Krivocapic, colleagues, it is a pleasure to have the opportunity once again to speak to you about the subject of gender equality. As Special Representative on Gender Issues since 2010, it has been a privilege to work with all of you to promote gender equality here within the OSCE PA and in the OSCE region.

Upon review of OSCE's gender-related activities this past year, I can proudly say that the OSCE has grown into a global leader on the subject of gender equality. I would like to underline that 2014 will be an important year for gender equality in the OSCE region. It is the 10-year anniversary of the *2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality*. This anniversary gives us the opportunity to review the priorities set out in the *Gender Action Plan* and to evaluate areas for improvement in the OSCE. Our parliamentary assembly should be actively involved in this process.

The *2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality* sets out six priority areas for OSCE efforts:

- Establishing non-discriminatory legal and policy frameworks;
- Preventing violence against women;
- Advancing the participation of women in political and public life;
- Promoting women's participation in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction;
- Endorsing equal opportunities for women in the economic sphere;
- Creating national mechanisms for the advancement of women.

This year, the Swiss Chairmanship-in-Office has made the implementation of existing human dimension commitments a priority. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly can contribute to this goal.

As I have stressed in my previous addresses, as parliamentarians, we should promote gender equality at our Assembly, in OSCE institutions, and within the OSCE participating states. At the OSCE PA, women play an important role in the Bureau; of 21 positions, nine (43%) are held by women, a statistic that remains unchanged from last year. We ought to applaud the hard work of the OSCE PA and encourage further advancement in 2014. Let us also acknowledge the female parliamentarians who put their names forward for positions on committees and in the OSCE PA in general. Whether you were elected or not, you set a great example and helped promote change. The OSCE PA has served as a model for ongoing progress in gender equality, but let us not hold back on our ambition and let's strive to increase the percentage at the 2014 Annual Session.

On the OSCE front, progress is also evident in the *Secretary General's 2013 Annual Evaluation Report on the Implementation of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality*. Gender balance among staff has improved; women holding senior management positions increased from 30% in May 2012 to a record high of 34% in May 2013. However, women remain under-represented in many fields; recently, six vacant Head of Mission positions were all filled by male

candidates. Even more sobering, since the establishment of OSCE Field Operations there have been only seven female Heads of Mission from a total of 128.¹ We need to encourage more qualified women to apply to OSCE leadership positions.

The *Secretary General's 2013 Annual Evaluation Report* also notes that there has been little progress in mainstreaming gender in projects across the OSCE. However, this progress is difficult to evaluate as the *Gender Action Plan* does not provide a baseline or indicators to measure progress and success. A possible step forward in 2014 could be the development of such a baseline or such indicators, to be included in an updated Action Plan.

As parliamentarians, we must recognize that the rate of change towards gender parity is too slow; it is not acceptable that we are crawling towards such an important goal. When we return to our parliaments, we need to do more to promote the OSCE and its mandate of building comprehensive security for both women and men.

What are some ways that parliamentarians can contribute to this goal? Let us start with what we know and do best – politics. We need to encourage more women to become involved in public life.

For many years, organizations such as the OSCE and the United Nations have identified the need to increase the proportion of women in parliaments. There has been a slow but consistent rise in the percentage of women, but most parliaments fall below the widely recognized 30% benchmark to ensure a critical mass of women. So, how are women faring across the world and in the OSCE region in terms of their participation and representation in parliaments?

- The world average for women's representation in single or lower houses of parliament was 21.8% as of November 2013.² This average has inched forward from around 15% ten years earlier.³
- In 2013, the average for OSCE member countries was 24.6% in single or lower houses of parliament, higher than the world average.⁴ Ten years earlier, the average was 17.6%.⁵
- In my country, Canada, the average is around 25% for women in our elected House of Commons⁶ and around 40% in our appointed Senate.⁷

¹ OSCE, *The Secretary General's Annual Evaluation Report on the Implementation of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality*, 28 November 2013, p. 7.

² Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in National Parliaments – World and Regional Averages](#), 1 November 2013.

³ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in National Parliaments – Statistical Archive](#).

⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in National Parliaments – World and Regional Averages](#), 1 November 2013.

⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in National Parliaments – Statistical Archive](#).

⁶ Parliament of Canada: ParlInfo, [Party Standings in the House of Commons](#), 17 January 2014.

⁷ Parliament of Canada: ParlInfo, [Party Standings in the Senate](#), 2 December 2013.

The international community has made several commitments to improve the representation of women in parliament. The 1979 United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, which most OSCE participating states have ratified,⁸ upholds the equal participation of women and men in public life. In the 1995 *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, UN member states committed themselves to “ensuring the full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”⁹ Simply put, women’s rights are human rights. In Beijing we also identified inequality between men and women in positions of power and decision making as one of its twelve key areas for action.

There are many international success stories for women’s participation and representation in parliaments. As of November 2013, 37 countries had reached the critical mass target of 30% of parliamentary seats being held by women¹⁰ - and of these countries, fifteen were OSCE participating states!¹¹ Let’s give these countries a round of applause. As well, let’s recognize one of own participating states, Andorra, which is the second country in the world, following Rwanda, to have attained at least 50% women members in its parliament. Andorra’s 2011 election saw 50% female-male representation in parliament, and this was without the assistance of quotas. These success stories should inspire us!

We also need to ask ourselves how women parliamentarians can be effective agents of change within their societies. As I mentioned last year at our Winter Meeting, over the past two years, the PA Secretariat and I participated in an on-going project being conducted by the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on parliamentary structures for women MPs across the OSCE region. I would like to thank ODIHR again for its cooperation on this initiative. From the information gathered, ODIHR produced a valuable publication entitled [Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region](#). Released in September 2013, this publication is the first of its kind in our region. The report, which you can download from the ODIHR website, examines the presence and operation of parliamentary bodies dedicated to women, including details about their mandates, organizational features, activities and successes. We should applaud ODIHR for taking on this ambitious project and for publishing such an informative report from which we will all benefit. I look forward to continued collaboration on projects between the OSCE PA, the OSCE’s Gender Section and ODIHR in the coming year.

⁸ One hundred and eighty-seven (187) of 194 UN member states have ratified CEDAW.

⁹ [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women](#), 1995, para. 9.

¹⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Women in national parliaments – World Classification](#), 1 November 2013.

¹¹ These fifteen countries, as of 1 November 2013, were: Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

The creation of a women's association or caucus provides a forum where women can network, share gender-related concerns and advance the mainstreaming of gender issues.¹² The 2013 ODIHR report indicates that women's parliamentary bodies are most effective if the organizations secure funding and human resources, and establish formal relationships with their respective parliaments.¹³ One example of such a parliamentary body is the Women Parliamentarians' Club of the Assembly of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which has a well-developed leadership, an approved Strategic Plan, and a decision-making structure with a coordinating body composed of representatives from each political group.¹⁴

I would also like to touch on the role of parliaments and parliamentarians in promoting women's political participation and representation. To encourage a greater number of women to participate in public life, there must be a shift in the public perception of women in politics. Parliament can promote this shift through public awareness movements and civic education with the goal of countering the cultural biases against women.¹⁵ As well, the rights of women as persons should be enshrined in a country's national constitution or a corresponding document.

Our Assembly has been collaborating with ODIHR on this important issue. Marc Carillet, who acts as the Gender Focal Point at the PA Secretariat, recently contributed to an ODIHR workshop on women's parliamentary participation held in Warsaw.

In early December last year, I had expected to participate in an international conference aimed at increasing women's political participation in Ukraine. The conference had to be postponed because of the outbreak of protests and violence related to the President's decision not to sign the EU Association agreement. I would like to take this opportunity to call on Ukrainian parliamentarians to push their government to reaffirm – through concrete action – Ukraine's commitment to the core principles underpinning our organization: respect for human rights and the rule of law. These principles must be put into action in order to respond to the genuine aspirations of the Ukrainian people.

I hope we will be able to reschedule the OSCE conference on women's political participation in Ukraine. The event is now more important than ever. The knowledge, skills and experience of Ukrainian women are vital to reaching a negotiated solution to the current crisis and women must participate fully and equally in its resolution.

¹² Inter-Parliamentary Union, [*Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*](#), Reports and documents no. 54, Geneva, Switzerland, 2008, pp. 68–69.

¹³ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, [*A Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region*](#), September 2013, p. 79.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁵ Julie Ballington, Inter-Parliamentary Union, [*Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*](#), 2008, p. 19.

The skills and perspectives of Ukrainian women will also be crucial to strengthening the implementation of OSCE commitments in their country at this critical time.

This discussion brings me back to the topic of my address last year: the importance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Last year, my address focused on drawing attention to this important issue and raising awareness about the need to see sexual violence in conflict as a crime that must be punished, rather than as an inevitable by-product of war.

In 2014, sexual violence in conflict continues to affect girls, women, families and communities around the world. For instance, a January 2014 UN report has documented the use of sexual violence against Syrian children in detention facilities run government forces and by some armed opposition groups. Sexual violence reportedly has been used as a means of torture to extract confessions from children themselves, their relatives or other detainees. Sexual violence has also been documented during house searches and at check-points in Syria.¹⁶ So grave is this problem in Syria that the report concludes,

*gender-based sexual violence and exploitation and the general vulnerability of children displaced within and outside the Syrian Arab Republic to such abuses remained of grave concern and are among the most worrisome consequences of the humanitarian crisis resulting from the conflict in Syria.*¹⁷

We can all agree that this type of brutality ought to have no place in our world. This year, in light of the 10th anniversary of the *2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality*, I would like to stress the need for action. As OSCE parliamentarians and as leaders in our societies, we need to push our governments and the OSCE to take concrete steps to better address the protection needs of women, as well as those of girls and boys, in conflict. Moreover, we must press our governments to recognize that women participate fully and equally at every stage of the conflict cycle. As parliamentarians, we can go out and raise awareness of women's contributions to comprehensive security within our societies and constituencies.

I applaud the 27 countries in the OSCE region that have adopted National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security, as well as the other countries that have opted for some alternative strategy or framework. These steps provide a positive influence on implementation of the resolution. The OSCE is presently reviewing National

¹⁶ [Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic](#), UN Security Council, 27 January 2014, UN Doc. S/2014/31, paras. 19, 34-38.

¹⁷ Ibid., para. 38.

Action Plans with the goal of compiling best practices and increasing effective implementation at the national level.¹⁸

I am pleased to report that integrating women, peace and security issues into the work of the OSCE gained momentum in 2013. The *Secretary General's Annual Evaluation Report* indicates that 34 of 57 participating states (60%) voluntarily reported on their implementation of women, peace and security issues, up from just 17 in 2009. The women, peace and security reporting is done as part of states' annual reporting to the OSCE's Forum for Security Co-Operation (FSC) on national practices implementing the 1994 Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security. When you go back to your capitals, I ask each of you to encourage your governments to begin or continue such reporting.

In another positive development, a number of participating states took the opportunity to discuss their national implementation of Resolution 1325 or the relevance of women, peace and security to other issues at the FSC, outside of discussions of the issue set by the Chair. Moving forward, there is also an acknowledgement amongst participating states of the need to understand better the ways in which small arms and light weapons affect women.¹⁹ Let us build on this momentum in 2014.

The analysis of the voluntary reports to the FSC contained in the *Secretary General's Annual Evaluation Report*,²⁰ also reveals some concrete areas where we can make progress. These include:

- Improving participating state's military capacity to gather data from women in communities affected by conflict, integrate this data into their conflict analysis and report on violations of the rights of women and girls;
- increasing women's contributions to states' armed forces and women's retention within these forces;
- improving data gathering and reporting on the deployment of women peace-keepers;
- increasing the number of participating states that deploy gender advisors to peacekeeping missions;
- improving the capacity of military forces to determine, address and report on the special needs of women and girls in conflict zones; and
- disseminating lessons learned and good practices regarding the implementation of national action plans.

¹⁸ OSCE, *The Secretary General's Annual Evaluation Report on the Implementation of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality*, 28 November 2013, p. 42.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 38-39.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 40-42.

I would also like to point out that the *Secretary General's Annual Evaluation Report* indicates that fewer than 20% of states that reported on women, peace and security provided any information on exploitation and abuse by members of their armed forces who are deployed as peacekeepers. Our role as parliamentarians is to promote civilian accountability and control of the military. Together, we need to press our governments to do better on this front.

I ask each of you, when you return home from Vienna, to consider the successes and challenges that your country faces in relation to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and OSCE commitments on gender equality. When we meet again at the Annual Session in Baku, I would like to invite you all to attend our annual gender lunch. I encourage you to come prepared to share your perspectives on the ways in which your country is implementing Resolution 1325 and promoting women's participation in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. We can use the information you bring forward identify best practices and lessons learned, which will allow our Assembly to contribute to strengthening the OSCE's understanding of the ways in which women, peace and security issues contribute to comprehensive security in our region.

As we know, when women do not participate in peace conferences, boardrooms, and parliaments around the world, their valuable contributions to decision-making processes are denied. There is truth to Secretary General of the UN Ban Ki-moon's statement: "The world will never reach 100 per cent of its potential if we exclude 50 percent of its people."²¹

Thank you for your attention.

²¹United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, [Latest Statements: Andorra, 2 April 2013 – Secretary General's address to Parliament of Andorra](#), 2 April 2013.