



ADDRESS BY

DR. HEDY FRY

SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON GENDER ISSUES

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

INTRODUCTION

Since my appointment as the OSCE PA's Special Representative on Gender Issues in 2010, the OSCE and its member countries have made important strides in the fight for gender equality. Nonetheless, there continues to be room for improvement.

In the following address, I will provide updates on some developments relevant to my mandate. Then, I will share some initial ideas for the 2019 gender report.

2018 OSCE MINISTERIAL MEETING

I am pleased to report that the 2018 Ministerial Meeting produced several important advancements for gender equality. Perhaps most importantly, the Ministerial Council passed a decision on preventing and combating violence against women after four years of being unable to reach consensus on this topic.¹ I commend participating States for coming to agreement on steps to address what is not only a grave violation of human rights, but a global epidemic. The decision lists a number of important commitments, including promoting the engagement of men and boys in preventing and combating violence against women, and implementing measures against sexual harassment. In addition, it recognizes the important work of the OSCE PA on these issues.

It appears, however, that reaching consensus resulted in the exclusion of several important issues from the decision. In particular, it lacks reference to intimate partner violence; violence against, and harassment of, women journalists, bloggers, politicians, civil society activists and human rights defenders; and violence against women and girls in conflict situations. I discussed those issues at length in my report last year to this Assembly, which focused on gender-based violence. It is my hope that the Ministerial Council will be able to come to consensus on the inclusion of these important topics and adopt a more comprehensive decision on preventing and combating violence against women later this year.

In a victory for human rights more generally, the Ministerial Council also achieved consensus on a decision regarding the safety of journalists, the first decision to be adopted in four years that relates to the human dimension of the OSCE's work.² The adoption of this decision was in no small part due to the extensive efforts of the OSCE Secretariat and chairmanships over the years to bring attention to the issue of freedom of expression and media freedom. I was pleased to see that it makes reference to the distinct risks that women journalists face and underlines the importance of addressing their concerns and ensuring their safety. It also condemns all violence against women journalists in relation to their work. I applaud the OSCE for its important work in this area, including through the Safety of Female Journalists Online project which provides tools and resources to female journalists who have been targets of abuse, and raises awareness of the issue throughout the OSCE region.³ The Decision on Safety of Journalists is an extremely timely and important one in

¹ OSCE Ministerial Council, [Decision No. 4/18: Preventing and Combating Violence against Women](#), Milan 2018, 7 December 2018.

² OSCE Ministerial Council, [Decision No. 3/18: Safety of Journalists](#), Milan 2018, 7 December 2018; OSCE, "[OSCE Ministerial Council in Milan concludes with decisions in OSCE's politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions](#)," News release, 7 December 2018.

³ OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, [#SOFJO: Safety of Female Journalists Online](#).

today's world where journalists are significantly under threat for doing their jobs; where freedom of the press is under attack and where one of the main pillars of democracy itself is at risk.

2017 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

I would also like to highlight the *2017 Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the OSCE 2004 Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality*, which the Secretary General presented to the Permanent Council in 2018.⁴ The annual report is the result of the commendable efforts of the Senior Adviser on Gender Issues and her team in the OSCE's Gender Section. The report acknowledged several important areas of progress. The OSCE experienced two gender-related milestones in 2017 of note. For the first time in the Organization's history, the Secretariat achieved gender parity at the director level. In another first, all OSCE field operations had gender focal points in 2017 – increasing from 61 Gender Focal Points in 2016 to 112 in 2017.

In addition, the Office of Internal Oversight completed its evaluation of the implementation of the 2004 Gender Action Plan, which produced an in-depth overview of the OSCE's progress on gender mainstreaming over the last five years. The evaluation revealed ongoing gaps in the capacity of staff to mainstream gender in OSCE programs and projects. It also identified the need to increase the effectiveness of gender-specific programming.

In 2017, the Gender Section also began a survey on the prevalence of violence against women in conflict and non-conflict settings in countries in the Balkan region. I look forward to the survey's results, which are expected in March of this year.

While advancements are clearly being made, the 2017 Annual Progress Report makes clear that there is also significant room for improvement. For example, three quarters of the heads of OSCE Institutions and the OSCE Secretariat appointed in 2017 were men. The majority of OSCE projects have yet to implement gender mainstreaming – only 30% of OSCE projects in 2017 were fully gender mainstreamed, and 9% had no gender mainstreaming at all. The fact that gender focal points, gender officers and gender advisers are incorrectly perceived as being *solely* responsible for gender mainstreaming is a major challenge that continues to undermine effective gender mainstreaming. The OSCE must provide the necessary education, training, and resources to make it clear that gender mainstreaming – by definition – is the responsibility of *all* staff. What is more, the OSCE continues to lack a centralized repository of knowledge, resources and tools that would support OSCE staff to integrate gender perspective in their work. I repeat the Gender Section's call for all participating States to support the creation of such a repository.

2018 TRIP TO UKRAINE

As part of my mandate, I had the opportunity to travel to Ukraine in July 2018 to meet with OSCE project managers there, numerous government officials and a wide range of non-governmental organizations. I also met with the Head of the OSCE Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, Ambassador Apakan, his then Deputy, Aleska Simkic, and staff from the office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine. Discussions during these meetings focused on Ukraine's efforts to combat domestic

⁴ OSCE, "[Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the OSCE 2004 Gender Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality – 2017](#)," 6 July 2018.

violence as well as to promote the participation of women in public life, in policing and in all stages of conflict in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. The meetings also revealed the extent to which the conflict in Ukraine has exacerbated human trafficking in the country, including trafficking of women for sexual and labour exploitation.

It became clear to me that gender equality projects, programs and policies are necessary to advance Ukraine's reform agenda and conflict-resolution efforts. In this context, I was pleased to learn that Ukrainian officials at the highest levels are committed to gender equality, to the intersectionality of gender and to the expansion of human rights, and are working with international partners and the OSCE to achieve that goal. I want to thank all those with whom I met with in Ukraine for sharing their valuable insights, and to commend their important work in this area.

GENDER EQUALITY AND YOUTH

I will now turn to the subject of my report for this year: gender equality and youth. As parliamentarians, investing in and supporting youth is an essential part of ensuring our countries' sustainable economic and social development. Gender equality among youth is a key component of this support. However, these topics tend to be viewed in silos rather than as a comprehensive multifactorial issue.⁵ My 2019 gender report will shed light on these issues as they relate to each other and hopefully provide a roadmap for the OSCE, participating States, and parliamentarians.

Issues affecting Young Women and Girls

The issues affecting young women and girls today in the OSCE region and beyond are numerous. To start, while gender-based violence affects all women, teenaged girls are at particular risk. In Canada, for example, police data indicates that adolescent girls are almost four times as likely to experience sexual violence compared to women aged 25 and over.⁶ In a Swiss study, 22% of girls aged 15 to 17 reported having experienced sexual violence compared to 8% of adolescent boys. Researchers in the United States found that 23% of adolescent girls surveyed had been sexually victimized in the previous year, compared to 10% of adolescent boys.⁷ Young women and girls are now more vulnerable to attacks online, which is a form of gender-based violence, causing permanent and irrevocable harm. Girls also constitute the majority of victims of online grooming of children for sexual purposes and sexual solicitation.⁸ In acknowledgment of this reality, the Government of Canada has prioritized the elimination of online child exploitation in its Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence.⁹

Traditional gender roles continue to influence girls and boys in their educational and career choices, constraining the advancement of women in society. Young women and girls are less likely than young men and boys to enrol in science, technology, engineering or math (STEM). Instead, young

⁵ European Institute for Gender Equality, "[Relevance of gender in the policy area](#)," *Youth*.

⁶ Statistics Canada, "[Police-reported violence against girls and young women in Canada, 2017](#)," 17 December 2018.

⁷ UNICEF, "[Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children](#)," September 2014, pp. 80-81.

⁸ International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children, "[Online Grooming of Children for Sexual Purposes: Model Legislation & Global Review](#)," 1st ed., 2017, p. 2.

⁹ Status of Women Canada, "[Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence](#)."

women and girls dominate in such traditional fields as education and nursing, which lead to careers with earnings that are lower than those in fields dominated by men.¹⁰ By allowing such practices to continue, we are limiting the career possibilities of young women and girls; constraining their opportunities to hold leadership positions in STEM fields; and affecting their nation's global competitiveness. The absence of women in senior positions, in turn, discourages more women from becoming professionals in the STEM areas. It is, in short, a vicious cycle.

Conflicts and emergencies also have a disproportionately negative impact on the rights of young women and girls. For example, while access to education is limited to all children in such settings, girls are less likely to be in school. In addition, early, forced and child marriage has been shown to escalate in conflict and humanitarian settings. Young women and girls are particularly at risk of sexual violence, including sexual slavery, while also experiencing other forms of gender-based violence and discrimination.¹¹ Despite these risks, UN Women has noted that most peace and security interventions targeting youth prioritize young men, and ignore the needs and perspectives of young women.¹²

Migrant young women and girls, many of whom have also been affected by conflict, face similar challenges. They are at greatest risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation and experiencing sexual attacks along migration routes. They are also more likely to face barriers to health care, especially sexual and reproductive health services.¹³ Further, access to education for young migrant women is "particularly problematic for those who have missed years of education because of poverty, conflict or other disruptive events. Returning to school is difficult because of the loss of wages as well as conflicting responsibilities, including care of children and other family members."¹⁴ I must emphasize, however, that *all* migrant youth face significant dangers and challenges. In a stark representation of this fact, it is estimated that at least 10,000 migrant children have gone missing after arriving in Europe. Many of these children are feared to be exploited for sexual or labour purposes.¹⁵

Listening to the Voices of Young Women and Girls

Now that I have outlined some examples of the issues that affect young women and girls in the OSCE region and beyond, the question is: what can we as parliamentarians do? It is my belief that we must make every effort to hear their voices – at home, in school, at work and in politics. We must champion and support programs that encourage girls to discover and use their voices, by raising their self-esteem and developing their talents and skills, particularly in the traditionally male fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Policies and laws that seek to eliminate all discrimination against girls and young women must be prioritized. Young women and girls must be

¹⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], [Cracking the code: Girls' and women's education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics \(STEM\)](#), 2017.

¹¹ UN Women, [Facts and figures: Peace and security](#).

¹² UN Women, [Young women in peace and security](#).

¹³ UN Population Fund, "[Five reasons migration is a feminist issue](#)," News release, 9 April 2018.

¹⁴ Dr. Susan Martin and Donald G. Herzberg, "[Chapter 4: Adolescent and Young Women Migrants](#)" in *Migration and Youth: Challenges and Opportunities*, UNICEF, 2014, p. 17.

¹⁵ Anja Radjenovic, [At a glance: Disappearance of migrant children in Europe](#), European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2017.

consulted in the development of these policies and laws. We must also invest in young women's leadership and economic empowerment, and encourage their participation in politics. Indeed, research indicates that women's political participation ensures that important issues such as gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions and gender-equality laws remain high on the legislative agenda.¹⁶ Furthermore, it is critical that we consider the needs and perspectives of young women at all stages of the conflict cycle and promote their participation in peace processes. According to one study, peace agreements are 20% more likely to last at least two years, and are 35% more likely to last 15 years, when women fully participate.¹⁷

Involvement of Young Men and Boys

The importance of involving young men and boys in efforts to achieve gender equality cannot be overstated. According to UN Women, adolescence and young adulthood are a "critical period of opportunity to engage boys and young men in understanding why gender equality is good for everyone and recognizing their role in the empowerment of girls and young women."¹⁸

Cultural conceptions of masculinity – that a man must be tough, unemotional, powerful, and dominant – are at the root of gender inequality. Not only are they false; they are also dangerous, leading to high rates of gender-based violence, including domestic violence. Studies show that men who witnessed their mothers suffering abuse by their fathers are more likely to inflict abuse against their own partners later in life.¹⁹ This reality goes against the very concept of family values espoused by members of this Assembly. Without intervention, the cycle of violence continues.

We must also take a hard look at the unique issues affecting young men, boys and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) youth. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found that among its member countries, many of which are participating States, boys are 4 percentage points more likely than girls to be low-achievers in school.²⁰ Meanwhile, migrant boys *and* girls tend to perform less well than their schoolmates born in the host country.²¹ Men, including adolescent men, are at higher risk of suicide than women. In Europe, for example, men are four times as likely as women to die by suicide.²² The risk of suicide is also high among LGBTQ youth.²³ Addressing these and other issues is central to a holistic and intersectional youth and gender equality strategy.

¹⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union, [Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments](#), 2009.

¹⁷ Laurel Stone, "Annex II, Quantitative Analysis of Women's participation in Peace Processes," in Marie O'Reilly, Andrea Ó Súilleabháin and Thania Paffenholz, *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes*, New York: International Peace Institute, New York, June 2015

¹⁸ UN Women, [Engaging boys and young men in gender equality](#).

¹⁹ White Ribbon Campaign, [Issue Brief: Engaging Men and Boys to Reduce and Prevent Gender-Based Violence](#), April 2011.

²⁰ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], [The ABC of Gender Equality in Education: Aptitude, Behaviour, Confidence](#), 2015.

²¹ Emma Harte et. al., [Education of EU migrant children in EU Member States](#), RAND Europe, 2016.

²² World Health Organization, "[Suicide data](#)," *Mental health*.

²³ In Canada, LGBTQ youth are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers: Egale, [What You Should Know About LGBTQ Youth Suicide in Canada](#).

PROVIDING FOR A SAFER FUTURE: YOUTH, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND GENDER EQUALITY

A discussion of the issues affecting today's youth is incomplete without analysis of the world we are leaving them to inherit. Indeed, one of the goals of the Slovak Chairmanship for 2019 is to provide for a safer future by engaging with youth and promoting sustainable development, among other measures. The single greatest issue affecting the future for youth is, of course, climate change. With this point in mind, I intend to focus part of my report on the gendered impacts of climate change, particularly as they relate to young women and girls.

Women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change. As many women and girls are the principal users and managers of natural resources, the primary caregivers and the keepers of the home, they are involved with, and depend on, the resources that are most likely to be affected by climate change.²⁴ In addition, there is a growing body of research indicating that climate change is likely to increase the risk of conflict, which will in turn lead to the conflict-related impacts on young women and girls that I described earlier.²⁵ Conflict and natural disasters spurred by climate change will also generate increased migration.²⁶ I have spoken at length to this Assembly about the unique risks and challenges faced by migrant women and girls, a population that is sure to grow as climate change worsens.

CONCLUSION

Important strides continue to be made in the fight for gender equality within the OSCE area and beyond, but significant gaps in inclusion and opportunity persist. Successful gender equality strategies require consideration of, and consultation with, all relevant groups, including youth. As I have enumerated, young women and girls have unique needs and concerns. Those include higher rates of gender-based violence; the influence of traditional gender roles and stereotypes in their educational and career paths; and the heightened risk of sexual violence during conflicts and emergencies.

To address these challenges, it is imperative that we champion causes that promote the participation of young women and girls in decision-making processes and that give them access to the full range of educational opportunities. The involvement of young men and boys in gender equality policies and programs is equally critical. We must work with them to dismantle pervasive gender stereotypes that are at the root of gender inequality, while making it clear that their unique challenges – such as higher rates of suicide – are also a priority.

Finally, I would emphasize that, in all our policies, laws and programs directed at young women and girls, the focus must be on securing their safe and bright future. At the highest level, that work is about ensuring that there continues to be a world in which they can thrive and prosper, as we as parliamentarians have been fortunate to do. It is with that fundamental objective in mind that I plan to also address the gender aspects of climate change in my forthcoming report.

²⁴ Government of Canada, [Women and climate change](#).

²⁵ Richard Akresh, "[Climate Change, Conflict, and Children](#)," *The Future of Children*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Spring 2016.

²⁶ Marcus Arcanjo, "[Climate Migration: A Growing Global Crisis](#)," *Climate Institute*, 30 April 2018.

Women make up half the world. It follows, then, that for our countries' continued social and economic development, policies and laws that are made by and for women are critical. I look forward to presenting my 2019 report at the Annual Session this July.