



ADDRESS BY

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon. I'm thrilled to be speaking to you today in my capacity as the Special Representative on Gender Issues for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). As we embark on this new decade, I note that 2020 marks an especially important year for gender equality. It represents the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the first of its kind that recognized the necessity of including women in decision-making processes at all stages of conflict. UNSCR 1325 has provided a blueprint for the OSCE's ongoing work in this area.¹ This year also marks the 25th anniversary of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* signed by 189 countries, the first major international agreement dedicated exclusively to advancing the rights of women and girls.² As I reflect on my ten years as Special Representative and on these important anniversaries, I recognize and applaud the significant strides and improvements the OSCE PA and its participating States have made in the pursuit of gender equality. However, significant challenges remain and must be addressed.

In my remarks to you today, I will provide updates on various issues relevant to my mandate. Then, I will share some initial ideas for the 2020 gender report, which I will present at the 2020 Annual Session in my home town of Vancouver, Canada.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

Since my remarks to you last year, there have been numerous developments related to gender equality within the OSCE and its operations that I would like to highlight. First, in July 2019 OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger presented the *2018 Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the OSCE 2004 Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality* to the organization's Permanent Council.³ The report noted several areas of progress regarding gender equality in the organization, including:

- the release of the OSCE-led [Survey on the Well-being and Safety of Women](#), which provides much-needed data on the prevalence of violence against women in South-eastern and Eastern Europe;
- the production of the documentary film [A Dark Place](#) by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, which highlights the experiences of female journalists affected by online harassment;
- an increase in efforts to combat sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse within the organization and its various activities;
- ongoing gender mainstreaming training of OSCE staff;
- the development of the OSCE Gender Parity Strategy 2019–2026, with the goal of achieving gender parity across all levels of the OSCE by 2026; and
- the banning of male-only panels at OSCE events.

¹ United Nations [UN] Security Council, [Resolution 1325 \(2000\)](#), 31 October 2000.

² UN, [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), 15 September 1995.

³ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE], [2018 Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the OSCE 2004 Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality](#).

These and other advances in the quest for gender equality are terrific achievements and should be applauded. There remains, however, continued room for improvement. For example, although the OSCE has almost reached gender parity, with 52% of staff being male and 48% being female, there continues to be a distinct lack of women in positions of senior management and as heads of missions. Women are also underrepresented in seconded positions, due to a lack of female nominations for these roles on the part of participating States.⁴ I reiterate the OSCE's call in the 2018 annual progress report to participating States to nominate more women for these important posts.

I would also like to welcome Albania as this year's OSCE Chair. I was pleased to see that the Albanian Chairmanship intends to focus significant energy on gender issues, notably combating violence against women and promoting the role of women in peace and security.⁵ I am hopeful that these initiatives will focus on empowering women, including them in decision-making processes and moving beyond the harmful narrative that women are victims in need of saving. I look forward to a renewed and increased focus on these and other issues of importance for gender equality in 2020 and beyond.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS AND POLITICIANS

I will now turn to the subject of my report for this year: violence against women journalists and politicians. Gender-based violence affects all women, regardless of position or status, but can manifest in dangerous and alarming ways for women in the public eye. I note that gender-based violence refers to not just physical abuse but also words, actions, or attempts to degrade, control, humiliate, or threaten another person on account of their gender.⁶ As reports of violence against women journalists and politicians, particularly in online spaces, continue to emerge with distressing frequency, I have determined that it is important to focus this year's report on this topic.

As we all know, violence against women is a global epidemic that affects at least one in three women worldwide.⁷ It is rooted in harmful stereotypes and patriarchal social norms that identify women as inferior to men, and men as being entitled to women's bodies. In the case of women in journalism and politics, these stereotypes and norms are behind the intense scrutiny these women face on matters including their appearance, intellect, personal relationships, professional credentials, and "likeability." With the advent of the #MeToo movement, awareness of gender-based violence and its impacts on women in all aspects of their lives, including the workplace, has increased but unfortunately the problem itself continues unabated.

Over the years, countries in the OSCE region and beyond have made significant advances in gender equality. These include an increase of women in the workplace and women in government, and the subsequent involvement of more women in important decision-making processes. With an increase of women in these spaces, however, there has been a backlash from groups and individuals resisting women's equal participation. Women in journalism and politics are particularly affected because they are in the public eye and at significant risk of gender-based violence as a result.

⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵ OSCE, [Programme of the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship 2020](#).

⁶ Status of Women Canada, [About Gender-Based Violence](#).

⁷ UN Women, [Facts and figures: Ending violence against women](#).

A. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS

Numerous observers agree that attacks on freedom of the press and on the activities of journalists have intensified in recent years. Increasingly hostile political rhetoric towards the media across the OSCE region and beyond, combined with the advent of social media, have put unique pressures on all journalists.⁸ They are now expected to be present and active on social media as part of their basic activities, which, while raising their profile and distributing their work to a wider audience, places them at greater risk of violence and harassment both physically and online. As stated in one 2018 report:

Not only are they being required to use social channels as part of their work, they are also using social channels that blend personal and professional identities, exposing them to threats 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from domestic and international sources.⁹

Both men and women in the media face immense risk for doing their jobs. Reporters Without Borders reports that worldwide in 2019, 389 journalists and media workers were detained, 57 were held hostage, and 49 were killed as a direct result of their journalistic work.¹⁰ In the OSCE region, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media reports that journalists are regularly subject to harassment, threats, detainment, targeted attacks and even killings.¹¹

While both men and women face considerable risk as journalists, women face additional danger simply on account of their gender. In fact, in response to a recent survey, the majority of women journalist respondents reported gender being a factor in the attacks and threats they faced in their roles.¹² Every day, women journalists face sexist threats and attacks based on their appearance, personal relationships, intellect, and professional credentials, most commonly online where perpetrators remain anonymous and unaccountable. The same survey found that, among the 597 women journalists they interviewed from across the globe:

- 63% had been threatened or harassed online;
- 58% had been threatened or harassed in person;
- 26% had been physically attacked; and
- 10% received one or more death threats in the past year.¹³

⁸ UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, [Intensified Attacks, New Defences: Developments in the Fight to Protect Journalists and End Impunity](#), 2019; Reporters Without Borders [RSF], [RSF's 2018 round-up of deadly attacks and abuses against journalists – figures up in all categories](#), 14 December 2018; and Dr. Michelle Ferrier, [Attacks and Harassment: The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting](#), TrollBusters and International Women's Media Foundation, 2018.

⁹ Dr. Michelle Ferrier, [Attacks and Harassment: The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting](#), TrollBusters and International Women's Media Foundation, 2018.

¹⁰ Reporters Without Borders, [Worldwide Round-Up of journalists killed, detained, held hostage, or missing in 2019](#).

¹¹ See OSCE, The Representative on Freedom of the Media, [Regular Report to the Permanent Council for the period from 5 July 2019 to 21 November 2019](#), 21 November 2019; and OSCE, The Representative on Freedom of the Media, [Regular Report to the Permanent Council for the period from 22 November 2018 to 4 July 2019](#), 4 July 2019.

¹² Dr. Michelle Ferrier, [Attacks and Harassment: The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting](#), TrollBusters and International Women's Media Foundation, 2018.

¹³ Ibid.

In addition, 90% of those surveyed agreed that online threats against them had increased in the past five years. These alarming numbers demonstrate the gravity of the myriad challenges and threats faced by women journalists around the world.

The impact of these gendered attacks is to silence women's voices in the media. To protect themselves and those close to them, women journalists often change their behaviour and activities out of necessity – they may self-censor, close their social media accounts, or avoid covering certain stories that could draw more negative attention. At worst, women may choose to leave the profession for their own mental and physical well-being.¹⁴ In addition to the disruption of women's careers, the result of this systematic silencing is a less diverse and representative media. Numerous studies show that more diverse newsrooms lead to more accurate and fulsome reporting and coverage of issues that would otherwise be dismissed, including issues of importance to women.¹⁵

B. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN POLITICIANS

Just as with journalists, politicians all over the world, regardless of gender, are often vulnerable to harassment, threats and attacks. In 2019, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians identified human rights violations against 533 MPs in 40 countries, with threats and acts of intimidation being one of the most common violations. Of these MPs, 64 were in Europe.¹⁶

While all politicians are subject to human rights violations, women politicians face additional risks in the form of sexist attacks and discrimination much like their counterparts in journalism. Indeed, women politicians and journalists share many similarities generally: they operate in the public eye and are subject to public scrutiny, they often bring attention to potentially controversial issues that are of importance to women, and they are working in spaces once reserved for men. In the case of politics, while the increase of women in this space around the world marks an important advancement for democracy, it has also provoked significant backlash. This resistance manifests in different ways, including sexist remarks, intimidation, harassment and even violence.

As explained by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women:

Men and women can both experience violence in politics. Such acts of violence against women, however, target them because of their gender and take gender-based forms, such as sexist threats or sexual harassment and violence. Their aim is to discourage women from being politically active and exercising their human rights and to influence, restrict or prevent the political participation of individual women and women as a group.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid.; and Amnesty International, [Toxic Twitter – A Toxic Place for Women](#), 2018.

¹⁵ Anna Griffin, "[Where Are the Women?](#)," *Nieman Reports*, 11 September 2014.

¹⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], [Violations of the human rights of MPs in 2019](#).

¹⁷ UN General Assembly, [Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics](#), 6 August 2018, p. 5.

A 2016 survey of women politicians by the IPU revealed the shocking extent to which women in politics face discrimination and violence on account of their gender. Of the women surveyed, during their time in office:

- 81.8% had experienced psychological violence;
- 21.8% had experienced sexual violence; and
- 25.5% had experienced physical violence.¹⁸

Most instances of psychological violence involved humiliating sexual or sexist remarks as well as threats of death, rape and other violence. The majority of these attacks occurred online.¹⁹

I suspect that women in this room have experienced similar threats and attacks. Indeed, all of us in this room, men and women alike, have at the very least seen reports on the news of the real risks that women in politics face. The impacts on these women are similar to those felt by women in journalism. Women politicians may feel forced to make decisions for their safety that undermine their ability to fulfil their mandate and freely express their opinions. For example, to protect themselves, women may decide to travel less or avoid certain areas, increase their security, shut down their social media, and self-censor. Many women may leave politics entirely.²⁰

Violence against women in politics not only represents a threat to women, but to democracy itself. As we know, women are still significantly underrepresented in parliaments around the world, despite advances in recent decades. As of October 2019, 24.3% of all parliamentarians in national parliaments were women, up from 11.3% in 1997.²¹ Until violence against women politicians is sufficiently addressed, this significant lack of equal representation will persist.

C. INTERSECTIONALITY

In my upcoming report, I will also address the need to consider an intersectional approach in our efforts to combat violence against women journalists and politicians. The concept of intersectionality in this context recognizes that women are a diverse group of individuals that experience sexist discrimination and attacks differently based on their race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and other factors.²² In its survey of women politicians, for example, the IPU noted that women under 40 faced more threats and attacks, particularly online, than their older counterparts. It also observed that women belonging to a minority group are disproportionately targeted not only for their gender but also their race, especially by far-right parties. Additionally, women in opposition parties, or who are vocal about women's rights, are at greater risk.²³ Acknowledgement of these realities is necessary in any response to gender-based violence.

¹⁸ IPU, [Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians](#), October 2016.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.; UN General Assembly, [Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics](#), 6 August 2018; and National Democratic Institute, [#NotTheCost: Stopping Violence against Women in Politics](#), June 2018.

²¹ IPU, ["Situation as of 1st October 2019," Women in National Parliaments](#); and IPU, ["Situation as of 25 December 1997," Women in National Parliaments](#).

²² Imkaan, [The Value of Intersectionality in Understanding Violence against Women and Girls \(VAWG\)](#), July 2019.

²³ IPU, [Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians](#), October 2016.

D. WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

In my report, I also intend to touch briefly on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda and how it relates to violence against women journalists and politicians. As I stated earlier, this year marks the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on WPS. To recognize the important milestone this year represents, my report will explore the importance of considering how violence against women journalists and politicians can hinder efforts to meaningfully include women in peace and security processes. As these women face threats and attacks on account of their gender, their ability to actively participate in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction suffers. It is important that we consider these impacts as we continue efforts to implement the WPS agenda in the OSCE region.

E. WAYS FORWARD

The surveys I have cited and others indicate that women in journalism and politics often avoid reporting the threats and attacks they face for a number of reasons. These include fear of retribution or punishment, or of appearing weak or unfit for the “tough” worlds of journalism and politics. In addition, many women felt that the costs of speaking out outweighed the benefits, as they doubted their superiors or the authorities would properly respond to their complaints.²⁴ Indeed, these are the reasons many women, irrespective of their occupation, avoid reporting gender-based violence.

As parliamentarians, it is crucial that we bring attention to this problem and no longer support, even indirectly, the culture of silence, stigma and impunity that is associated with gender-based violence. We must speak publicly in support of our colleagues when they have such experiences and never minimize the impact on them. We must also champion policies and laws that support women, encourage them to report instances of sexual harassment and assault, and provide effective remedies. Furthermore, any approach to this problem must include strategies to counter online threats and other forms of cyberviolence.

I note with appreciation the OSCE’s focus on the problem of violence against women in journalism and politics, as evidenced by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media’s campaign for the Safety of Female Journalists Online and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights’ work to promote women’s political participation and gender equality.²⁵ In addition, in 2018 the Ministerial Council passed two decisions on the safety of journalists and violence against women, respectively, that address the unique risks faced by women journalists and politicians.²⁶ I urge all parliamentarians to continue to support the OSCE in this important work.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, violence against women in journalism and politics requires our urgent attention and action. While I have focused my remarks on the many risks and threats women in these positions face on a daily

²⁴ Ibid.; UN General Assembly, [Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics](#), 6 August 2018; and National Democratic Institute, [#NotTheCost: Stopping Violence against Women in Politics](#), June 2018.

²⁵ OSCE, [Safety of Female Journalists Online](#); and OSCE, [Promoting women’s political participation and gender equality](#).

²⁶ OSCE, [Decision No. 3/18: Safety of Journalists](#), Ministerial Council, Milan, 7 December 2018; and OSCE, [Decision No. 4/18: Preventing and Combating Violence against Women](#), Ministerial Council, Milan, 7 December 2018.

basis simply due to their gender, I would like to recognize the strength and resilience of these women despite this reality. Of the women politicians surveyed by the IPU, 80% said that the threats and attacks they encountered strengthened their determination to fulfil their parliamentary mission.²⁷ Nevertheless, gender-based violence should never be the “price of admission” for women seeking careers in journalism, politics or any other field. I look forward to presenting my report on this important topic at this year’s Annual Session and welcome feedback from you in the interim.

Thank you for your attention.

²⁷ IPU, [Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians](#), October 2016.