



ADDRESS BY

DR. HEDY FRY

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

14TH WINTER MEETING

18–20 FEBRUARY 2015

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

GENDER AND THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OSCE

President Kanerva, Colleagues,

My purpose in speaking to you today is, as always, to raise awareness at our meetings about gender issues. To this end, I want to take this opportunity to share with you some thoughts about a theme I will be exploring for my annual report. But before I do that, I would like to update you on some developments relevant to my mandate.

Two Ministerial Council decisions related to gender issues were adopted by the Ministerial Council in Basel this past December: A Decision on an Addendum to the 2004 Gender Action Plan and a Decision on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women.

I. AN ADDENDUM TO THE 2004 GENDER ACTION PLAN

The participating States considered a draft decision on gender equality and an Addendum to the 2004 Gender Action Plan last autumn, but were unable to come to agreement on a final text in Basel. Unfortunately, some States attempted to restrict the scope of the resolution or to weaken commitments related to the promotion and achievement of gender equality.

As a result, the Ministerial Council was only able to adopt a decision directing the participating States to finalize an Addendum to the 2004 Gender Action Plan¹ and present it to the Permanent Council for adoption in 2015. This process has not yet been initiated and I urge the Serbian Chairmanship to take swift action.

On a more positive note, during the negotiations, the participating States considered ways in which the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and my office, the Special Representative on Gender Issues, could contribute to the OSCE's efforts to strengthen women's political participation. Also, thanks to you all in the PA and the work we have done here.

A second point of interest during the negotiations was a proposal to create a new, integrated gender equality structure within the OSCE Secretariat. This new structure would have combined the current Office of the Senior Adviser on Gender Issues with that of the Chairperson-in-Office's Special Representative on Gender. The aim of the proposal was to raise the profile of gender issues at the political level within the OSCE, while simultaneously strengthening institutional support available within OSCE structures. Ultimately, however, this proposal did not attract consensus. This is where you, as parliamentarians, can return and push your governments to support this initiative.

¹ Ministerial Council, [Decision No. 14/04, 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality](#), 7 December 2004.

II. ADOPTION OF A MINISTERIAL COUNCIL DECISION ON PREVENTING AND COMBATTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In Basel, the Ministerial Council adopted a *Decision on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women*.² The Decision includes the provisions dealing with violence against women found in the proposed Addendum to the 2004 Gender Action Plan that had attracted consensus amongst participating States. It calls on participating States and OSCE executive structures to take action in five different areas related to combatting violence against women: the legal framework, prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership.

III. PRELIMINARY IDEAS FOR THE 2015 GENDER REPORT

Reflecting on efforts to strengthen the OSCE's work on gender equality at the inter-state level brings me to the work that our Assembly will undertake this summer, as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act. As this important anniversary approaches, OSCE parliamentarians should think about ways to reconfirm and build upon the OSCE's achievements across all three dimensions.³ Our Assembly has a particular role to play in presenting a parliamentary perspective on the organization's future, and in strengthening its parliamentary facet going forward. In keeping with this role, my report in Helsinki will examine the eight thematic areas that have been identified as areas of focus for the Helsinki +40 Process by participating States. My report will use gender-based analysis to examine key aspects of these eight themes, in order to demonstrate how gender can be integrated into efforts to strengthen the OSCE as it evolves to meet the security needs of the future. I will also identify contributions that parliamentarians can make to bring a gender perspective to these issues at the national level.

A. Applying Gender-Based Analysis to Helsinki +40: Three Examples

i) *Enhancing the strategic orientation of the economic and environmental dimension*

As part of the Helsinki +40 process, participating States are thinking about ways to enhance the work of the second dimension. A vital component of this effort is ensuring women's economic independence. Women's economic empowerment allows women to participate fully in society and to contribute to overall economic growth and development, thereby improving stability and comprehensive security for all.

Achieving these goals requires that women have equal access to property rights, financial services, education, skills training, affordable child care, employment opportunities and health care services, including the full range of information and

² Ministerial Council Decision No. 7/14, [Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women](#), 5 December 2014.

³ The OSCE's three dimensions are: the politico-military dimension (first dimension); [the Economic and Environmental Dimension](#) (second dimension); and the [human dimension](#) (third dimension).

care about their reproductive health. Women must also be equal before the law and enjoy the equal protection of the law, which means that laws must not discriminate *de jure* in the letter and intent of the law or *de facto* in its application.

Although participating States and OSCE structures have made efforts to address women's economic empowerment, including discussions during country visits undertaken by the OSCE's Special Representative on Gender issues, there remains much to be done. A more coordinated and strategic approach is needed to integrate these efforts systematically across policies, programs and activities. Examples of ways that parliamentarians can contribute to these efforts include pushing for changes to discriminatory legislation, and through involvement, in partnership with the private sector, in the creation of women's mentoring and leadership networks. Parliamentarians can also encourage men to get involved, for example through programs to support women entrepreneurs.

ii) Strengthening the human dimension

Participating States are also examining ways to strengthen the OSCE's human dimension as part of the Helsinki +40 Process. An area of particular interest to parliamentarians is enhancing women's participation in politics and in public leadership as a component of good governance. Good governance, of course, is essential to comprehensive security. Across our region, women are too often excluded from decision-making positions in the political and public sphere. As a result, they do not participate equally in parliaments, in the executive branch of government, at peace conferences, or in boardrooms around the world. Yet, they make up over 51% of the population and are a resource to strengthen the competitiveness of nation states in a global economy.

As parliamentarians, we can take concrete steps to make our parliaments more gender-sensitive. For example, we can establish women's parliamentary structures (such as women's caucuses),⁴ develop anti-harassment policies, create more flexible and family-friendly procedural frameworks, establish parental leave policies, and ensure the availability of on-site childcare. By increasing the number of women in parliaments and by making parliamentary processes more gender-sensitive, we will also be able to respond better to the needs of both our male and female constituents. When more women are in parliament, parliament is more likely to be sensitive to the ways in which legislation and policy affects women and girls, men and boys differently. I encourage all parliamentarians to apply gender-based analysis as we scrutinize national budgets and proposed legislation to guard against unintended consequences that may disadvantage women or men.

Parliamentarians must take a leadership role in improving women's political participation in the OSCE area. Moreover, the participating States understand the value of the insights that parliamentarians can provide and have formally recognized

⁴ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, [Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region](#), September 2013.

our Assembly's role, so, we have a duty to deplore and address the unacceptable situation of women in refugee camps in Libya, Syria, Iraq and Egypt.

iii) Enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the OSCE

Part of the Helsinki +40 Process also involves efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the OSCE as an organization. Key amongst these is the implementation by the OSCE of gender-based analysis in every sphere of its endeavours. These efforts must look at ways to improve the OSCE's work on gender issues.

A number of steps have been taken recently to promote gender mainstreaming within OSCE structures. One of the most important advances in this respect was the deployment of a Gender Adviser as part of the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) at the mission's outset. This deployment has allowed a gender perspective to be taken into account in the planning process and throughout the course of the SMM's mandate. However, I note that the SMM is struggling to recruit women candidates for posts as monitors and for leadership positions.

The OSCE has also been doing important work mainstreaming a gender perspective in its Anti-Terrorism Unit, which has developed expertise in understanding and countering women's involvement in Islamic militancy. These efforts make an important contribution to achieving comprehensive security in the OSCE area and in our Partners for Cooperation. For example, they help us to understand and respond appropriately to the phenomenon of women from OSCE participating States joining the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (known by the acronyms ISIL or Daesh), or participating in other terrorist activity anchored in extremist religious ideologies.

I note, however, gender concerns are still not systematically mainstreamed in all areas of the OSCE's work, including at the field mission level. A system of gender focal-points has been created throughout OSCE structures, but these individuals are not always given the necessary training, time, incentives or resources, nor are they always at a sufficiently high level within the organization, to effectively mainstream gender issues. Furthermore, women continue to be under-represented within certain parts of the OSCE, in particular at senior leadership levels and in senior political roles.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In order to achieve change it is necessary to change outdated and ineffective systems. Our Assembly should press for a more systematic and effective approach to gender mainstreaming in the OSCE. We can promote this goal through our Assembly's own Helsinki +40 Project and by helping to generate the political will needed to adopt an Addendum to the 2004 Gender Action Plan in 2015. When we return to our parliaments, we must also encourage qualified women to apply for

positions at the OSCE, and urge our governments to seek out and nominate such women – in particular for senior leadership posts within the organization.

I welcome your views on ways in which gender considerations should be taken into account by participating States in the Helsinki +40 Process, and in our Assembly's efforts to contribute to strengthening OSCE institutions for the future.

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of the United Nations' Beijing Declaration,⁵ when women's rights were acknowledged as human rights. Yet, a generation later, with a few notable exceptions, the continued inequality of women, the violation of their human rights in areas of armed conflict (where rape has become a strategy), the global trafficking and exploitation of women and girls, has increased.

Organized crime seems to be more powerful and technologically adept. They are able to exploit poverty, war and post conflict chaos to gain massive and easily replaceable networks of pawns.

Indigenous and ethnic women and girls are more vulnerable today than they ever were. Opportunity for education, training and well-paid work still eludes many. Unless we, as parliamentarians change our systems, push for laws that promote and ensure social justice and human rights, unless we set measurable goals and clear indicators for achieving gender equality, unless we adopt and adapt programs to achieve these goals, yet another generation of parliamentarians will be fighting these same battles, calling for these same changes; women's human rights will still be an elusive dream. It is said a nation will be judged by the way it treats its most vulnerable. It would be a tragedy if we, this generation of parliamentarians, here today, fail the world's daughters, sisters and mothers.

Thank you for your attention.

⁵ Fourth World Conference on Women, [*Beijing Declaration and Program of Action*](#), 1995.