



ADDRESS BY

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Colleagues,

Thank you for this opportunity to focus our attention on gender as we do every year. I will be sharing some initial ideas for the annual OSCE PA gender report but first I would like to take a moment to speak about the recent 2016 Ministerial Council meeting outcomes and the priorities of the Austrian Chairmanship for 2017.

MINISTERIAL COUNCIL AND AUSTRIAN CHAIRMANSHIP

Foreign Ministers from OSCE participating States met in Hamburg, Germany, at the beginning of December for the 23rd OSCE Ministerial Council. Topics discussed included migrants and refugees, good governance, arms control and terrorism. In the 12 decisions, declarations and statements that were agreed to at the meetings, the word “women” was used only three times, once in relation to the role of women in countering terrorism and violent extremism and twice in relation to small arms and light weapons.¹ The term “gender” was not mentioned once.

The OSCE is a security organization. We know that the security issues affecting men and women, and boys and girls, can be different. Are we really addressing our populations’ security needs if we are not considering gender in a more integrated and consistent manner at the highest level?

Last year, my gender report outlined the gendered aspects of the migrant and refugee influx in Europe. While it is to be applauded that the Ministerial Council came out with a decision on migrants and refugees, it is unfortunate that the gendered aspects of this issue were not addressed in that decision. I strongly urge the OSCE Executive Structures to consistently conduct gender-based analysis (also often referred to as gender mainstreaming) as they continue working on migration and refugee issues as requested in decision No. 3/16 of the Ministerial Council.

I also call on our governments to gender mainstream all of their work at the OSCE and hope to see far more analysis of the gender-related aspects of the security issues we are working on collectively in the decisions, declarations and statements coming out of the 24th Ministerial Council to be held in Vienna this coming December.

¹ OSCE Ministerial Council, [Doc 1 – Declaration on Strengthening OSCE Efforts to Prevent and Counter Terrorism](#), 9 December 2016. The relevant part states:

We stress the importance of co-operation among OSCE participating States, including by involving where appropriate, civil society, to prevent and counter terrorism. We also underscore the important role that civil society, in particular youth, families, women, victims of terrorism, religious, cultural and education leaders, as well as the media and the private sector can play in preventing VERT, *inter alia* by countering terrorist and violent extremism messaging and offering alternatives to these narratives, including on the Internet, social and other media. We encourage political leaders and public figures including from civil society and religious leaders to speak out strongly and promptly against violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.

OSCE Ministerial Council, [Doc 3 – Ministerial Declaration on OSCE Assistance Projects in the Field of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition](#), 9 December 2016. The relevant part states:

Invite participating States to exchange views and information and share best practices, on a voluntary basis and if relevant to the mandate of the FSC, to address the impact of excessive and destabilizing accumulation and uncontrolled spread of SALW and conventional ammunition on women and children as well as creating equal opportunities for women’s participation in policymaking, planning and implementation processes with regard to the OSCE assistance projects in the field of SALW and SCA.

Austria's [program](#) for its 2017 Chairmanship includes plans to encourage the participation of women in its efforts to address the protracted conflicts in the OSCE region. I applaud this commitment and would request that the Austrian Chairmanship go beyond *encouraging* women to *ensure* that qualified women are at the table in various capacities, including leadership positions, as discussions and negotiations take place to resolve these conflicts. The Austrian program also commits to gender mainstreaming throughout its activities and initiatives planned for 2017. I applaud this commitment and look forward to seeing it put into action.

INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

I would now like to focus on the topic of this year's OSCE PA gender report. In 2017, I will be expanding on the topic of last year's report, [A Gender Sensitive Response to the Migrant and Refugee Influx in Europe is Needed](#). This year's gender report will focus more extensively on one aspect of the issue, integration into host communities. The hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees that have arrived in Europe and other parts of the OSCE region in the last couple of years are settling into their new lives and thousands continue to arrive. Integration of these newcomers will be a crucial issue for future peace and prosperity.

In Canada, both houses of Parliament recently examined how Canada's government and our communities have done in integrating Syrian refugees to date, following a major initiative to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees over a four-month period from November 2015 to February 2016, with additional refugees arriving after that. The parliamentary committees made a variety of recommendations for the integration of refugees into host communities that reinforced the importance of language training (including childcare for parents taking classes), employment and culturally appropriate mental health services and interventions to address domestic and gender-based violence, among other issues.²

Human Rights Watch has also outlined the following as key factors for successful integration: legal status, appropriate accommodation, access to employment and education (including language classes) and family reunification.³

The 2017 gender report that will be presented in Minsk this summer will address the various factors that are key for the integration of refugees and migrants using a gender lens. For today, I will limit my comments to the social and cultural aspects of integration. This is an area in which there have been some troubling trends in recent years as anti-immigrant parties have seen their popularity increase in the OSCE region.

I would like to focus on three key issues required for social integration: the importance of developing a social network, ensuring a welcoming host community and providing concrete, practical supports for refugees and migrants to be able to learn about their new society and to fully integrate in their new home. Promoting integration is not only the responsibility of governments. In Canada, for example, we have a private sponsorship program, which started with the Vietnamese boat people and engages individual Canadians in welcoming refugees and, as I will discuss further in a moment, is key to our success in integrating them into our society.

² House of Commons, Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, [After the Warm Welcome: Ensuring that Syrian Refugees Succeed](#), 1 November 2016; Senate, Standing Committee on Human Rights, [Finding Refuge in Canada: A Syrian Resettlement Story](#), December 2016.

³ Judith Sunderland, [For Europe, Integrating Refugees Is the Next Big Challenge](#), Human Rights Watch, 13 January 2016.

Social Networks

We know that social networks are necessary for well-being. Refugees and migrants often have to start from scratch and build an entirely new network in a foreign culture. This can be challenging but it is absolutely necessary. The UNHCR states that:

[T]he abundance vs. lack of safe and supportive social connections can be the difference between recovery and a path toward self-reliance versus despair and isolation leading to deprivation.⁴

Refugees and migrants must reach out of their comfort zone and engage with their new society. This can be particularly difficult for women, who are often expected to maintain traditional roles in the home. A 2016 European Parliament research paper explains that women and girls are often expected to maintain the family's cultural identity, resulting in more isolation while the men and boys of the family are allowed to more fully integrate into the host community.⁵

For women, there is also a greater risk of sexual and gender-based violence associated with migration as a woman loses her existing networks of protection and support when she migrates or flees persecution.⁶ Moreover, often new social networks are made up of individuals who come from the same country as the migrant or refugee but who have been in the host country for some time; it cannot be assumed that a woman will be best off relying on other members from the same country or ethnicity. Women who have been abused, exploited or rejected by their community may need to look outside the ethnic community for support.⁷

Some methods to support the development of social networks that have worked include the creation of mutual support groups for women refugees and mentorship programs with host community members or refugees and migrants who have been in the country longer. In addition, having caseworkers of the same gender and who speak a woman's language, while not being from the same country or ethnicity, has been seen to be beneficial in encouraging women to seek out assistance in integration.⁸

In Canada, there is a rather unique program, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program where private individuals and organizations can come together to sponsor a refugee. The results have been very successful. Though often the individuals who come as privately sponsored refugees are better educated and already speak one of Canada's official languages, these are not the only reasons for their greater success in integration. These refugees also benefit from an immediate and sustained social network, their sponsorship group. The sponsorship groups vary. They may be two individuals who sponsor a relative or an entire community organization with dozens of volunteers involved in supporting the refugee who may become long-term friends. For the most part, privately

⁴ UNHCR, [Resettlement and Women-at-Risk: Can the Risk Be Reduced?](#), p. 28 [UNHCR].

⁵ Silvia Sansonetti, [Female refugees and asylum seekers: the issue of integration](#), European Parliament Policy Department, Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, 2016, p. 8.

⁶ UNHCR, p. 28.

⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 25–26. Having someone from the same ethnic community or nationality can be perceived as too close to the individual's community, which may result in a lack of trust and unwillingness to confide about the challenges they are facing for fear that others in the community will find out what was said.

sponsored refugees arrive with a support network in place whereas government sponsored refugees and individuals who make their own way to Canada and apply for refugee status once already in the country must rely on often overworked settlement caseworkers.⁹

Having a caseworker is simply not the same as having a friend or family member committed to helping you to integrate. This is why both parliamentary committees that studied the issue recommended exploring ways to connect individuals who are interested in providing social supports with refugees, even where the refugees are not part of the private sponsorship program. Simply having someone to talk to who knows the host community and culture and has a network of contacts already established can be invaluable.

The Importance of a Welcoming Host Community

The private sponsorship model, as with any successful model of integration, requires two parties willing to engage: host community members and the refugees themselves. No matter how hard a refugee tries to integrate, if the host community is not willing to be welcoming and to hire them, it will not be possible. In research conducted by UNHCR a number of years ago, refugees listed discrimination and a lack of understanding of the refugee situation by host community members as key barriers to integration.¹⁰ As UNHCR has noted:

Integration ... refers to a two-way process in which the newcomer becomes a member of the new community and the new community adapts to receive newcomers as full members. In successful integration refugees are able to contribute their gifts and skills, become self-reliant, and a new multi-cultural community is formed.¹¹

Mutual respect. Solidarity. Curiosity. Embracing diversity as a strength. These are principles that are needed to address refugee and migrant influxes and they are too often lacking in our communities these days. Refugees and migrants will not be able to successfully integrate if they do not feel welcome and safe in our communities.

As political leaders, we have a choice. Will we promote multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious societies or promote xenophobia and fear of the “Other”? I am particularly concerned about the willingness of some of our leaders to exclude refugees based on their religion and about the treatment of Muslim women who choose to cover their head for religious reasons. Many of these women have been insulted and even assaulted for expressing their right to freedom of religion.

We cannot build welcoming societies by making women feel they must choose between hiding in their homes or giving up their religion. We must build communities that are accepting of diverse beliefs and ways of living. This is true for all members of our communities but especially so to be able to reach out to women who may have very different lived experiences than our own and integrate them into our societies.

⁹ See Senate, Standing Committee on Human Rights, [Finding Refuge in Canada: A Syrian Resettlement Story](#), December 2016, for more on this issue.

¹⁰ UNHCR, [Note on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union](#), May 2007, para. 5 [UNHCR 2007].

¹¹ UNHCR, p. 28.

There are many ways we can act as parliamentarians to build welcoming societies. We can pass budgets that provide funds for programs that teach about and promote inclusivity and laws against spreading hate because of religion, racial or other such characteristics. We can demonstrate our commitment to these ideals through our attendance at diverse cultural and religious events and by how we speak publicly and privately about newcomers. We can share our approaches to gender with the people arriving in our countries and discuss the differences that may exist in the refugees' and migrants' home countries.

Small, local initiatives are crucial. Funding for refugees to join sports leagues, community gardens and other activities that have membership fees that they may not be able to afford is a great way to encourage interaction with host community members. Having refugees do presentations in schools and universities also strengthens understanding of refugee issues from an early age to promote greater compassion.¹²

Whatever way we approach this issue, we must meet the refugees and migrants halfway. As Human Rights Watch recently argued:

[I]ntegration policies that require people to shed fundamental aspects of their identity are unlikely to succeed. Sustainable integration should aim at giving migrants a real stake in their new home, encouraging participation rather than exclusion, while requiring full adherence to laws and respect for the rights of others.¹³

Practical Support

There are many practical considerations for the integration of migrants and refugees that can promote social integration. Good planning and communications are required to prepare host communities for the arrival of new people with different customs and beliefs. This should include information about the culture and society which refugees and migrants have left to be better able to understand them.¹⁴

How services are provided can also have a big impact. For example, individuals providing public services or assistance are critical in establishing both negative or positive feelings toward the host community, and whether trust and confidence develop for a refugee.¹⁵ Having the right people in those positions is critical for first impressions. Another example is the issue of accommodation. Providing accommodation separate from host communities keeps refugees and migrants isolated, making integration and the development of relationships with host community members more difficult. Providing the opportunity to learn the local language opens up the opportunity to talk with

¹² UNHCR, [Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration](#), Chapter 2.11 [Creating Welcoming and Hospitable Communities and Restoring Faith in Government](#), 1 October 2002, p. 219 [UNHCR 2002].

¹³ Sunderland.

¹⁴ Ibid.; UNHCR, p. 32.

¹⁵ Sansonetti, p. 9.

local people.¹⁶ Affordable childcare is also fundamental for mothers to be able to engage with the local society and become involved in language training and community activities.¹⁷

Support is required to help men, women, boys and girls to adapt to new gender norms and to work through the tensions these may create, particularly as women and children may become more independent in their new society. For men who were used to being the authority figure in the family and the primary breadwinner, it can be difficult to adjust to the reality of unemployment and shifting power dynamics in the family. Younger men who arrive alone may not have learned skills such as cooking as they relied on other family members back home. Women may also be accustomed to greater community support and require assistance in adapting to a more nuclear family-based lifestyle. Again, mentorship can be helpful in adapting to new realities.¹⁸

Refugees who have been in the host country for some time are great resources and a number of countries have successfully integrated established refugees into settlement organizations to assist other refugees. They have language skills, the ability to understand both the host community and refugee world views, knowledge of the integration process developed through their own personal experience, and credibility with refugees because of their background.¹⁹

CONCLUSIONS

The social integration piece is not simply in the interests of refugees and migrants. To have safe and functioning communities, everyone must feel that they are a part of society and have opportunities. As noted in the Ministerial Decision on migrants and refugees, the OSCE can play an important role in sharing best practices on this topic. I strongly advise that gender be considered as part of this work. I will be outlining my ideas in more detail at the summer meeting and would welcome feedback from delegates in the meantime.

¹⁶ Josie Christodoulou, [Measures to Integrate Women Refugees in the society in Cyprus and to promote a Multi-cultural Society](#), Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, December 2006, pp. 3–4; UNHCR 2007, para. 10.

¹⁷ UNHCR, p. 34.

¹⁸ UNHCR 2002, pp. 245–250.

¹⁹ UNHCR, p. 147.