



OSCE PA Special Representative Dr. Hedy Fry's Address on International Women's Day

8 March 2023

Friends and Colleagues,

Every year, on March 8, we celebrate the economic, social, cultural and political achievements of women. Every year, on this day, we reflect on how far women have come in their struggle for equality and how much there remains to be done.

As parliamentarians, we should not forget the importance of International Women's Day and the history behind it. This day has become a time to reflect on progress, all the way from the women's suffrage movement – a decades-long fight to win the right to vote in elections, a cornerstone of democracy. International Women's Day is also a time to draw attention to inequalities and mobilise for meaningful change. We know that many women are discriminated against not only because of their gender, because they are women, but also because of the fact that they may be racialized, indigenous or LGBTQ women, women who come from different vulnerable positions in life.

While significant progress has been made since the early 20th century, inequalities persist. Women have the right to vote and to be elected in the majority of countries but remain underrepresented in the political sphere. [According to the IPU](#), as of February 2023, the percentage of women in national parliaments is 26.6%. While the average percentage of women in parliaments in the [OSCE region](#) is 30.6%, more work remains to be done to achieve gender equality in politics.

The COVID-19 pandemic and armed conflicts have negatively affected women's rights in the world and in the OSCE region in recent years. We know, for instance, that in the war in Ukraine and in other conflict areas, women are the majority of victims, they are the majority of refugees, they are prone to trafficking and are at risk of rape and sexual slavery. At the same time, gender-based violence, including against women in politics, as well as against women journalists, is a widespread and intensifying issue that no country in the world has entirely managed to tackle.

As a woman parliamentarian from the OSCE region and as the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues, I join in the celebration of women all over the world.

In my 30 years as a member of the Canadian Parliament, I am honoured to have worked alongside women who are making a positive impact on the world, bringing us closer to gender equality. I am also lucky to have seen men support women, as gender equality is not possible without women and men working together.

I applaud women in the OSCE region for the courage, strength, and resilience they continue to show in overcoming the many challenges they face, especially in times of crisis.

As the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues, I continue to monitor and raise awareness about a variety of important gender-related topics in the OSCE region.

I congratulate women parliamentarians for advocating for gender equality through their work and by leading by example, and I call on my fellow OSCE PA parliamentarians, men and women, to take action to make gender equality a reality.

Happy International Women's Day to you all!