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CiO Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Conference

5-6 September, Tetovo/North Macedonia

Joint Statement

Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,

On behalf of a number of participating States proactively pushing forward gender equality and women's empowerment issues – namely Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, the United States of America – we welcome the CiO's efforts in organising this important conference and would like to share recommendations and commitments related to enhance gender mainstreaming in the OSCE and across all dimensions.

Women, in all their diversity, play a vital role in preventing conflict and forging and maintaining peace. We need to promote their agency and full, equal and meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making in the area of peace & security. At the same time, we must ensure the respect, protection and fulfilment of rights of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people, including those in the most vulnerable and marginalised situations, who are disproportionately affected by conflict and war. This has been particularly highlighted by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, where women are courageously contributing to defending their country's territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty, while facing greater risks of gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence. Not only are women at the frontline, but they are also indispensable in keeping the country going and rebuilding it across all sectors of society.

We recommend enhancing the existing OSCE's support for women and girls in Ukraine, as through the WIN project, and being mindful of intersectional aspects. In the context of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, we should focus on holding the perpetrators accountable for conflict-related sexual violence, and fight impunity for the aggressors in order to eliminate and prevent all forms of CRSV. We should provide the victims and survivors with socio-psychological support, while also promoting women's role in the future peacebuilding process and reconstruction of Ukraine. To streamline our efforts on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, we should take stock of current activities and progress in the OSCE area as well as systematically identify gaps and needs in order to yield more effective and visible results in the future.

Corruption mostly affects people living in poverty, 70 percent of whom are women. The interdependence between gender inequalities and corrupt networks is a vicious circle, which can only be broken by applying a gender perspective while developing and implementing effective and sustainable solutions.

We recommend strengthening the existing efforts to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the development and implementation of anti-corruption activities. Furthermore, a gender perspective should be included into anti-corruption policies, like it has been done through the OSCE Presence in Albania's round table, the Mission to Serbia's anti-corruption toolkit and the Mission to Skopje's report on sexual extortion as an act of corruption. The latter was highlighted in the Secretary General's 2022 Annual Progress Report on the promotion of Gender Equality.

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To counter the appalling underrepresentation of women in political and public life, especially in decision-making processes, decisive action is needed to end all forms of discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence, including technology facilitated. Discrimination and SGBV prevent women from fully participating and engaging in public and political life and holds back societies and communities which prevent their society from reaching their full potential. Structural barriers and underlying causes of exclusion need to be eliminated, keeping in mind intersectional aspects.

We recommend further engaging with politicians and political parties, including through the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. We also recommend investing in further training and awareness raising to remove unconscious bias and eliminate barriers to political participation. This includes preventing and fighting against online SGBV and harassment, dismantling patriarchal gender stereotypes and empowering all women and girls in taking up leadership roles. This will be beneficial to all parts of society, including men and boys, and lead to more inclusive legislation and overall progress and welfare. We fully support the decisive action of ODIHR and the RFoM in this regard. In addition to OSCE projects, the field missions and delegations' efforts, the OSCE E-Learning platform turns out to be an ideal tool to further this endeavour. The Secretary General's Networking Platform for Women Leaders, Peacebuilders and Mediators also provides a unique opportunity for networking and experience sharing amongst women peace builders throughout the OSCE area.

Mr. Chairperson, dear colleagues,

Our delegations jointly commit to:

1. Continuing to support the OSCE Secretary General and Chairperson-in-Office, as well as the Secretariat, autonomous institutions and field missions in promoting gender equality and women's and girl's rights and empowerment, encouraging them to prioritize support to women and girls and civil society and to make use of the Chair's "Gender Equality Box".
2. Keeping up our support for all women and girls, as well as grassroots women's rights organisations and movements in Ukraine, especially with view to their role in recovery and reconstruction.
3. Ensuring gender-balanced panels at OSCE events and meetings in all three dimensions.
4. Organizing more trainings, programs and events to raise awareness, empower women and girls and increase the overall commitment for gender equality action (e.g. Barbershop Conference, mentoring programs), keeping in mind its cross-dimensional nature and intersectional aspects.
5. Securing a safe, inclusive and discrimination-free working environment within the OSCE, including through our nomination of an inclusive and diverse pool of candidates for seconded positions and paying due attention to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH).

We encourage all participating States to join these commitments.

In conclusion, let us underline why all of this matters: Gender Equality is not an isolated issue; it is intertwined with all topics across the three dimensions of the OSCE. Gender Equality is an issue of universal human rights and a driver for peaceful and prosperous societies, sustainable development and progress and key to mitigating climate impacts. Therefore, it is crucial that all genders actively engage towards its promotion and foster systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective within the OSCE. For that, the full implementation and follow-up of the 2004 Gender Action Plan, and all OSCE commitments to advance gender equality, is of paramount importance.

Thank you.