



**Statement by Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iceland,
Helga Hauksdóttir, at the Closing Session of the 2023 OSCE
Conference on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment,
6 September 2023, Tetovo, North-Macedonia**

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Iceland would like to express its gratitude to the North-Macedonia Chairpersonship for their commitment to keeping gender equality, women's empowerment and WPS high on the OSCE agenda. We also commend the OSCE structures for their efforts to advance gender equality. Gender mainstreaming in all activities must remain a priority.

Russia's illegal and brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has clearly demonstrated the enduring importance of the WPS agenda. In Ukraine and all over the world, women are courageously and resiliently building peace every day, fighting for their rights, their lives, their communities, and their countries.

Every war is accompanied by a surge in gender-based violence and Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine is no exception. Gender equality can never be fully realized without ending all forms of gender-based violence, including technology facilitated violence, be it in war or peace.

Mr. Chair,

We need more women in roles of leadership. We need more women at the table where deals are done, and decisions are made. It is not only a matter of justice and human rights. Gender equality and women's leadership and participation in public and political life is **fundamental** to democracy and **essential** for inclusive and sustainable peace and comprehensive security.

Hard won gains must never be taken for granted. And amidst the current global backlash against women's rights, democratic backsliding, and rising authoritarianism, we must forever be reminded to do our utmost to fight setbacks and protect our common values of democracy, freedom, and human rights, including gender equality.

On this note, I would like to raise the importance of engaging men and boys in the fight for gender equality. The Barbershop methodology, developed by Iceland in collaboration with UN Women in 2014, aims to raise awareness among men, to stress their role and responsibilities and to motivate men and boys to commit to upholding gender equality and become active agents of change.

Later this fall, Iceland, with a group of OSCE participating States, will organize a Barbershop Conference for participants in the Security Dialogue on WPS, organized by the Canadian Chairpersonship of the Forum for Security Cooperation. Invitations will be sent to your delegations in Vienna in due course.

Mr. Chair,

For the last 14 years, Iceland has been honoured to be ranked at the top of World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index. Iceland is also ranked as the safest country in the world, according to the Global Peace Index. It is a testament to the message of the WPS agenda: That gender equality goes hand in hand with stability and peace.

However, we must remain vigilant in our work. Iceland, as well as others, still has much work to do. In order to increase focus on gender equality and to keep the issue high on the Government's agenda, the portfolio has for a number of years been the responsibility of the Icelandic Prime Minister.

Addressing the root causes of gender inequality through transformative approaches is essential. We need everyone on board, and we all have critical roles to play. Our democracies, societies, and the security in our region depend on it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.