

Mr. Chairperson,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Mongolia, Norway, Switzerland, the United States and Canada.

Tomorrow (November 25) will mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, as well as the start of the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. This is an important opportunity to reflect on our efforts over the last year, to identify challenges and to take concrete actions now and throughout the year ahead to address what is one of the most widespread abuses of human rights worldwide.

We all know that violence against women and girls takes many forms, including domestic violence; intimate partner violence; threats and harassment online and offline; sexual violence in conflict; child, early and forced marriage; as well as female genital mutilation. We also acknowledge that multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination can increase the risk of violence. The OSCE region is not free of any of these ills, and we must re-double our efforts to eliminate such violence at local, national, regional and international levels.

In this context, we welcome the July 2016 OSCE Gender Conference on Violence Against Women which focused on prevention, victim support and addressing impunity, and we look forward to tomorrow's symposium on "combatting femicide". We also appreciate the efforts of Ambassador Beham and her team in the Secretariat to organise the September workshop for participating States who are developing or renewing their National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security.

Mr Chairperson,

It has been said time and again, but the fact remains that the enduring unequal treatment of women and girls is one of the main reasons they are unable to fully realize their human rights, and is a contributing factor to violence committed against them. This unequal treatment comes at grave human and economic cost to individuals, families, communities and societies. Simply put, it is a barrier to peace and development, and has severe consequences for our collective and comprehensive security.

We believe that the ultimate solution is not simply to "protect" women and girls. We need to change the enabling environment for such violence by making policy choices that empower women and girls to fully exercise their rights, to fully participate in leadership and decision-making processes, and to contribute equally to the political, economic and cultural life of democratic societies.

In order to meet the objectives we have set for ourselves through the 2030 SDG Agenda and to respect our international obligations and OSCE commitments on gender equality, we need men, women, girls and boys, to take determined and concerted action to bring about change. Political, business and community leaders all have an important role to play, as does the OSCE. In this context, we deeply regret the failure, for two years in a row, to reach agreement on an addendum to the 2004 OSCE Gender Action Plan.

But we continue to believe that the OSCE can and must demonstrate leadership and accountability through its actions and activities. Concretely, this includes measures such as:

- supporting the implementation both internally and by participating States of UNSCR Resolution 1325 and other key resolutions on Women, Peace and Security;
- continuing to use the Organisation's convening power to advance dialogue on key issues related to gender equality and violence against women, including online harassment;
- fully mainstreaming gender into its own work on the conflict cycle and other activities;
- increasing the attention paid to the gender aspects of hate crimes, discrimination and intolerance, as women often find themselves targeted both as women and as members of particular minorities.

In the immediate short-term, there are several ways the Organization could demonstrate its commitment. Firstly, continue building capacity for all OSCE staff and increase senior level engagement by providing hands-on support as well as stronger accountability mechanisms on gender mainstreaming for all managers, from the Secretary General on down. Secondly, it can increase the role and resources of the Senior Gender Advisor. Finally, the Secretariat and participating States can redouble their efforts to find and promote women candidates for positions across the Organization, its Institutions and its field operations, including the SMM.

Mr Chairperson, Colleagues,

We hope you will join us again this year in taking the pledge to end violence against women and girls, and in wearing the colour orange to demonstrate your support during this year's 16-day campaign.

Thank you.