



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY  
TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council  
Vienna, 7 March 2019

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

The International Women's Day may be a celebration, but it is also a day to recognise the struggle that women have endured to realise their human rights. Today, equality is part of the general political discourse. This has not come about by itself. It has come about because of efforts made by women, and their supporters, over many years. Results have been hard won, often reached against strong, persistent and mistakenly conservative opposition.

We often *discuss* gender equality, not least within the OSCE. As a participating State, Norway tries to do its best. We raise gender equality continuously, with states as well as with the executive structures. We hold all of us to our commitments. We try to be a good example and expect to be told when we are not. Nonetheless, our efforts have not been enough. A discussion in the Permanent Council, or even several discussions, is not enough. We must move beyond words and posturing. Why is it so hard to move to action? Why is it so hard to move beyond mere activities to real action with impact?

Why, as reported by Internal Oversight, do so many OSCE officials demonstrate "very limited understanding (or no understanding at all) of how the integration of a gender perspective could contribute to achieving the mission and larger objectives"?

10 years ago, women filled approximately 30 percent of senior management positions in the OSCE. One year ago, women continued to fill those same 30 percent. Over ten years, the OSCE has made literally no progress towards gender equality within senior management. Almost 60 percent of OSCE projects have limited or no gender mainstreaming, despite our binding 2004 commitments to integrate a gender perspective in all projects.

Even if the numbers were better, we can only *count* ourselves to gender parity, not to gender equality. Equality requires a conducive working environment, both physically and psychologically. It requires that we adapt our values and our mind-sets, and develop inclusive processes and incentives that benefit women as much as they do men.

Our current level of effort has not been good enough. Gender equality and women's rights remain a crosscutting priority for Norway. Not a single Euro of Norwegian funding will be made available to projects without an appropriate gender perspective.

The OSCE has a long way to go to reach gender equality. We will be here every step of the way to ensure that we are moving in the right direction and keeping up the pace. To this end, we will use every tool that we have. We will continue to engage on gender issues in the Permanent Council. More importantly, we will further increase our emphasis on the gender perspective of the OSCE's operational activities. Every executive structure can expect Norway to be paying attention to their gender reporting or lack thereof.

There is important work for gender equality being undertaken both within the OSCE and the region at large. As we have heard, Ms. Barbora Burajová and her organisation work methodically to counter gender-based and domestic violence in Slovakia. Such practical and effective work certainly deserves our support. Tomorrow, results of the OSCE survey on the well-being and safety of women will be presented here in the Hofburg, giving the participating States an opportunity for an updated factual basis to their efforts to ensure the safety of women.

We expect that progress be made; not only because gender equality is right or because it is an agreed commitment. We expect progress to be made because gender equality enables more effective societies and organisations. It increases the share of the population that can fulfil themselves, and those around them, through work and through participation. Only through gender equality can we realise our full potential as states and as the OSCE. This is no zero-sum game. It will benefit both women and men, girls and boys. There is no rational reason not to reach for that.

Much work remains, and the International Women's Day is no panacea. Still, it is an opportunity to pause and to reflect, to pay tribute to those who have brought us to where we are. After all, they and their achievements are worthy of celebration.