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STATEMENT ON THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY TO THE PERMANENT
COUNCIL

Vienna, 12 March 2020

We observe the International Women's 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 misconceived 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, or several discussions, in the Permanent Council makes little difference. 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 the OIO, do many supervisors and other staff alike hold the misconception that contributing to gender equality can be left to the 'gender people' most of them women, rather than understanding it as every staff member's responsibility?

Last year, we lamented that over the preceding 10 years, the OSCE had made literally no progress towards gender parity within senior management, and that almost 60 percent of OSCE projects have limited or no gender mainstreaming. This despite our binding 2004 commitments to integrate a gender perspective in all projects. Were more projects gender mainstreamed last year? While the recent designation of a number of female directors in the secretariat should bring us closer to parity, we must remember that the secretariat is only a small part of the entire OSCE.

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More importantly, even if the numbers were better: parity is not sufficient for 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. As we have said before, 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. We will continue to hold every executive structure to account on the integration of a gender perspective in their operational activities. We will bring attention to their gender reporting or lack thereof.

There is good work on gender equality being done within the OSCE. Over the last year, the OSCE has, among other things, concluded a significant survey on the well-being and safety of women. It has launched toolkits on how to understand gender in the prevention of VERLT, and on inclusion of women and effective peace processes. Several executive structures are improving their reporting on gender mainstreaming. This work deepens our knowledge of the issues, and supplies ideas on how to respond. This knowledge is for states to use to make progress, through the OSCE or elsewhere.

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 contributes to reaching all our objectives. It 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 do what we can for the benefit of all through equality for all.

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