

UK statement on UNSCR 1325

Thank you Mr Chair. As Chair of the Security Committee, Men Engage Network and as Ambassador for my country – I would like to thank both the Ukrainian FSC and Albanian PC Chairs for making the Women, Peace and Security agenda one of its key priorities and for dedicating today's Joint Security Dialogue to this important topic. Doing so reinforces the importance of gender equality in the achievement of peace and security efforts.

I'd like to extend my sincere gratitude to the distinguished speakers – the Minister of Defence from Albania, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs from Ukraine, and the Special Representative on Gender – for their invaluable time today. Their excellent insights serve to demonstrate both the great progress but also the complex challenges that still surround the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the OSCE region.

Mr Chair, we last had the opportunity to discuss the WPS agenda in March under the Turkish Chair, since then we have, and are, enduring an unprecedented crisis which has affected all our lives. Despite the physical restrictions, COVID-19 has brought many of us closer together as we seek out new ways to socialise, work and engage with each other. We have seen the brave response from those who are fighting this pandemic in medical centres and hospitals around the world and we recognise the sacrifices so many have already made. Two-thirds of the global healthcare workforce is female, placing women at the frontline of the pandemic. However, the conditions in which we now operate and live in during this crisis also present wider risks and threats. We must not let COVID-19 erode our progress on – and the importance of – the WPS agenda.

Over the past two decades – since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in October 2000 – a lot has been done to promote the importance of the Resolution and to implement its agenda. But significant challenges still remain. At the security dialogue in March, I highlighted that 20 years on – less than two-thirds of OSCE participating States had a National Action Plan. And we again encourage all participating States yet to adopt a Plan to do so as soon as possible.

On the Security Committee – for the transnational threats that the Committee covers – we need to deepen our understanding of gender dynamics. This is to better inform how we respond to these threats. For example, at our 2nd of March meeting, the Committee considered the importance of a whole of society approach to counter-terrorism and violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism. During that meeting, we heard about a project in the Western Balkans that highlighted the specific issues around female radicalisation. We want to continue to focus on specific, tangible examples and illustrations of gender dynamics and their importance for tackling transnational threats within the Committee.

In March, we welcomed the Women in the First Dimension group and with it, the List of Female Experts and welcome today the launch of the mentoring network.

We must capitalise on this initiative, ensuring whenever possible, those experts are represented at OSCE conferences and dialogues. We will do precisely this for the Security Committee this. And it is great to hear that this is exactly the intention of the ASRC.

Mr Chair, we heard earlier about the significant and valuable role women play in both Albania and Ukraine. In Albania we recognise its National Action Plan and tangible results in country. This includes the statistic that 35.4% of officers who joined the army last year were women. In Ukraine, we value the role women play in civil society, including as human rights defenders, and by ensuring access to humanitarian assistance, education, and healthcare on both sides of the contact line. We also routinely hear about the outstanding work being done by the SMM throughout Ukraine, including by women monitors.

Women's participation is key to the success and longevity of peace processes. This is important not only in Ukraine, but in all parts of the OSCE region affected by conflict, and at all stages of the conflict cycle. As an organisation, we must do better in ensuring that women are represented among OSCE mediators at all levels in the relevant formats related to protracted conflicts. It is incumbent on us to take full advantage of tools – such as the OSCE's "Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace Processes". And bring more women mediators to the table. This is also the case for female monitors.

As Chair of the OSCE MenEngage network, we will continue to raise awareness of the role and influence all of us can play in speaking out against inequality and ending gender based violence. Gender parity at all job levels in the OSCE; robust action against gender discrimination; and a zero tolerance approach on sexual harassment must happen – supported by tangible measures and actions from all of us. And we must end – collectively – sexual exploitation and abuse wherever and whenever it occurs. Representatives from the Men Engage Network are pleased to join the Female Ambassadors in their statement later today.

Mr Chair – in concluding – we have recently commemorated the 75 year Anniversary of VE day. It would be an oversight not to recognise the important role women played in that victory, including on the frontlines, and their fundamental role in rebuilding our societies and countries after the conflict. World War II provided a stimulus for social change and the fight for what we now recognise as gender equality. Yet, three quarters of a century later that inequality and discrimination still persist in the OSCE region. We need to continue to promote change and tackle it head on.

UNSCR 1325 affects every single one of us. It is about inclusive peace and security, where we take account of varied perspectives and ways of thinking. It is about ensuring that efforts to prevent, respond to, and resolve conflict take into account the needs of all of society. At its core – it is essential to achieve a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic OSCE region.

Thank you once again for putting a spotlight on this important topic. And I request that this statement be attached to the Journal of the Day.