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Session 3, Ms. Mia Mitchell, Director, Women's Global Development and Prosperity Unit, Office of Global Women's Issues, U.S. Department of State

Mia Mitchell, USA

Remarks

Thank you to Dr. Fry for that wonderful introduction. I would like to start by thanking Sweden for making women's economic empowerment a priority for their OSCE presidency this year and convening us around this very important topic.

Gender equality and women's empowerment, including women's economic empowerment, are top policy priorities for the United States.

Women's economic empowerment is critical to economic growth, peace, and security. When women are able to fully and freely contribute to the economy, with safe access to skills and opportunities, their families, communities, and countries prosper, and they serve as role models for other women and girls. By advancing opportunities for women's economic participation and entrepreneurship, we advance our collective security and further peace and prosperity for all.

The United States has long championed women's economic empowerment, and now more than ever, we believe it is critical to addressing the challenges facing our time. These challenges include: security and peace; access to healthcare and quality health systems, including amidst the COVID-19 pandemic; gender-based violence; climate change; and racial and economic inequality.

Women continue to have disproportionate roles in caregiving and in the frontline response to COVID, yet they are often restricted from access to economic tools and resources. Despite these obstacles, women here in the U.S. and abroad are helping their societies adapt to the changing environment, providing governments, civil society, and the private sector with critical insight into market demands, and presenting innovative solutions to improve the response. In the United States, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have passed laws to expand emergency family leave and medical leave to benefit American workers and employers by providing protection and relief, including to women at all levels, who are often primary caregivers to their families.

Around the world, the United States promotes women's opportunities in the workforce and as entrepreneurs, while tackling pervasive barriers and enhancing protections in policies, laws, and practices to facilitate women's participation in the economy. Since last year, the U.S. government has also led a global Call to Action on Women's Economic Empowerment, partnering with over 40 other governments to date to commit to increase economic opportunities

for women and reduce and tackle the pervasive barriers that still impact too many women worldwide. This cooperation on women's economic empowerment reinforces collaboration across the gender equality spectrum, including our shared efforts to advance the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, and to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

One of the particular areas that the United States has worked to address at home and abroad is women's participation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) sectors, which have traditionally been male-dominated.

Domestically, in the United States, we have found that while women make up almost 50 percent of the workforce, they comprise less than 25 percent of the workforce in STEM professions specifically. Women are also less likely to study STEM in undergraduate and graduate study, and, of those women who do pursue degree in STEM fields, only about 25 percent go on to work in STEM professions.

At the same time, there is an increasing demand for individuals with STEM degrees, as these are some of the most dynamic sectors of the U.S. economy, and indeed the global economy. Based on this growth and high demand, we also find that STEM workers, including women, earn more than comparable workers in non-STEM jobs. Crucially, we also find in the U.S. that not only do women earn higher wages in STEM fields relative to their non-STEM counterparts, but they also face a smaller gender wage gap.

To address these challenges and increase women's participation, the United States has recently passed several laws at the Federal level to advance opportunities for women and girls in STEM. These include:

- The Inspiring the Next Space Pioneers, Innovators, Researchers, and Explorers Women Act, or the INSPIRE Women Act, which directs our National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to encourage women and girls to study STEM and pursue careers in aerospace, while also engaging current and retired astronauts, scientists, engineers, and innovators, with K-12 female STEM students.
- The Promoting Women in Entrepreneurship Act authorizes the National Science Foundation to encourage its entrepreneurial programs to support women to extend their focus beyond the laboratory and into the commercial world.
- Additionally, another important step the United States has taken, again at a Federal level, is to publish annual data on American female inventors and patent holders, many of whom are in the STEM fields, to better capture their contributions to the American economy and society.

Internationally, the United States has also sought to increase economic opportunities for women in traditionally male-dominated fields, for instance:

- Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), we have launched an "Advancing Women Leaders in Energy" Project in Europe and Eurasia which seeks to provide training, and address anti-discrimination policies around women's pursuit of STEM education and careers, especially in the energy sector, including energy regulatory agencies. Through this project, USAID has connected promising mid-career professionals in public utility commissions in the region with senior leaders in the United States and European Union to provide tailored mentorship to advance participants' career growth.

- Additionally, through the Department of State, our Bureau for Economic and Business Affairs is partnering with the UN International Telecommunications Union (ITU) to provide technical training to women in areas of information and communication technology, working with the U.S. private sector to support women entrepreneurs in STEM, and advocating for this issue at the highest levels of government through economic policy dialogues.

These types of approaches – providing training and mentorship; increasing data and research; and addressing legal, policy, and cultural barriers – are essential to effectively increasing women’s participation in traditionally male-dominated sectors, and in the economy more broadly. This is the type of work that the U.S. hopes to do more of with our partners across the OSCE and beyond, and I look forward to discussing further with you all today. Thank you.