



Positive male role models are key in combatting VAW

Statement by Ambassador Andrej Benedejčič, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Slovenia and Chair of the OSCE MenEngage Network, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, at the 1205th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna, 29 November 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to start my statement on a positive note and inform the Permanent Council that two days ago the Slovenian Government decided to appoint Major General Alenka Ermenc as the new Chief of the General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces. To my knowledge, this has made her the first woman ever to hold the position of the Chief of Defense.

Let me therefore recall that only a few months ago Major General Ermenc was here, in this chamber, where she took part in the Security Dialogue that the Slovenian Chairmanship of the Forum for Security Co-operation organized on the topic of KFOR and its contribution to stability in the Western Balkans. I am mentioning this because that particular event also addressed in a very frank and open manner the issue of violence against women in the context of military deployments. I therefore think it is heartening to have someone like her to show that women are as capable as men in excelling in the armed forces, the very epitome of a male-dominated profession.

There are, however, some things that only men can do themselves. And that is to be positive role models for other men and boys. This is especially important in the prevention of violence against women, which is one of the most widespread and persistent human rights violations globally. Meaningful male engagement is therefore a must in effectively addressing this challenge.

Mr. Chairperson,

As the Chair of the OSCE MenEngage Network I am therefore proud that we have in our Organization an initiative that devotes special attention to this issue. Just last week members of the Network came together to make a video on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. You have all seen it and I think the message was clear; namely, that gender equality is a cross-cutting issue that affects all the participating States; that women's rights are human rights; that women's empowerment benefits all of us; and that violence against women and girls takes many different forms and has a destructive impact on our societies. That is why we condemn such unacceptable behavior and encourage everyone – but especially our fellow male colleagues – to do the same.

In this connection, let me point out that this is not the first such awareness-raising effort. In June, during the Annual Security Review Conference, members of the OSCE MenEngage Network performed the acclaimed documentary play SEVEN, which focused on the issue of violence against women. In May, the launching of the webpage of the Network coincided with the FSC Security Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security, which also addressed the nexus between gender equality on one hand and oppression and violence on the other.

In light of the Ministerial Council Meeting next week I would also like to refer to the draft Decision on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women. I welcome the fact that it refers to the importance of actively engaging men and boys in the efforts towards elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girls. I think it would be also appropriate to acknowledge in the text of the decision the efforts of the OSCE MenEngage Network in addressing this topic. I therefore very much hope that this year around we will be able to achieve consensus on this important document.

Mr. Chairperson,

Before concluding, I would like to commend the Italian OSCE Chairmanship for having promoted gender equality throughout the year. I was especially impressed with the way that the importance of women's empowerment was highlighted in the second dimension. This includes the 26th Economic and Environmental Forum, as well as the Conference on Challenges and Opportunities for Women to Shape Economic Progress in the OSCE Area. I took part in both of them and I was quite impressed.

Finally, let me say that violence against women persists in all of our participating States. Its elimination must be therefore one of our top priorities. It is an obstacle towards gender equality, which is inextricably linked with the concept of comprehensive security. I therefore hope that the future Slovak Chairmanship will also place this important issue high on its agenda in 2019.

Thank you.