

Gender equality Review Conference
On the Occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the 2004 OSCE Gender Action Plan
On 10 & 11 July 2014
At Neuer Saal, Hofburg, Vienna

The OSCE and participating States have made great advances in making gender equality a reality since the adoption of an action plan ten years ago, but new initiatives are needed in areas where progress has been lacking, said participants of the OSCE's first Gender Equality Review Conference, today in Vienna.

A two-day conference organised by the OSCE Gender Section, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship on the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality brought together 250 representatives of government, civil society and academia, to take stock of the progress made so far.

Doris Bingley, President of the European Centre of the International Council of Women (ECICW) and Hon General Secretary of the National Council of Women Malta was a speaker on Friday 11 with the theme: "Women's Participation in Political and Public Life"

"As the world's largest regional security organization and with its comprehensive concept of security, the OSCE is extremely well positioned to make a unique and important contribution in advancing gender equality," said Pekka Haavisto, the Finnish Minister for International Development in his keynote address. "The Action Plan was a milestone in this respect."

"However we need to address the protection and distinct needs of women and girls in conflicts by also play particular emphasis on supporting their active roles in preventing, managing and solving conflicts, and building more durable peace," said Haavisto

Ambassador Michael Gerber, Swiss Special Representative for Global Sustainable Development, said that, "persistent gender inequalities and discrimination against women and girls are not only a human rights violation but also a major obstacle to sustainable development and economic growth."

During the conference, Ambassador Miroslava Beham, the OSCE's Senior Advisor on Gender Issues, highlighted that the Action Plan had helped the Organization to promote equitable societies in participating States by changing the way the OSCE develops policies, programmes and projects. She said that the share of women holding senior management positions at the OSCE had jumped from 14 per cent in 2004 to 35 per cent today. She also urged participating States to develop ways and mechanisms of how to better share their experiences and good practices with the OSCE and among themselves so to track implementation of the action plan and close existing gaps.

ODIHR Director Michael Georg Link noted a number of challenges including the multiple forms of discrimination facing women and girls from Roma communities, the

need to combat domestic violence, and the fact that women make up only about 25 per cent of parliamentarians in the OSCE region.

“A better representation of women in political and public life is not only required to improve the representative nature, accountability, and quality of democracies, but it has a profound impact on the practice of politics and on the way laws and policies are able to respond to the needs of all citizens,” he said.

Ambassador Dubravka Šimonović, Croatia’s Permanent Representative to the OSCE and Committee member of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), emphasized the synergies between the Convention and the Action Plan. She added that there needs to be an annual review of the implementation of the Action Plan in order to accelerate progress towards fully achieving gender equality in the OSCE region.

The Swiss OSCE Chairmanship, with the support of Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender Issues June Zeitlin, will draw on the discussions of this conference to identify the necessary actions to enhance efforts by the OSCE and participating States in achieving gender equality.

Switzerland and Serbia have both expressed their commitment to work on enhancing gender mainstreaming and implementing of all gender-related commitments during their consecutive OSCE Chairmanships in 2014 and 2015.

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) presented its *Handbook on Promoting Women’s Participation in Political Parties* at a side event on the second day of the OSCE Gender Equality Review Conference in Vienna on 11 July 2014.

The handbook is the first tool of its kind for the OSCE region, produced to support political party leaders in facilitating broader access for women to party structures and elected office. The handbook highlights different strategies for enhancing women’s participation in political parties, including successful examples from political parties in the OSCE region, such as voluntary measures and capacity-building initiatives.

“Political parties play a key role in increasing women’s political participation, both as candidates and holders of elected office,” said Beatriz Balbin, First Deputy Director of ODIHR. “We must recognize women’s rights to participate on an equal footing in all spheres of decision-making process within political parties.”

As part of the event, members of parliament, political actors, gender equality experts and representatives of international and civil society organizations exchanged ideas and discussed good practices for advancing women’s role in political parties within the OSCE region.

The 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality is available at www.osce.org/pc/14713