



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 4: Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Clifford Bond
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, October 4, 2006

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this set of issues which are very important to my government and to me personally as the father of two young women.

In the Helsinki Final Act, the participating States decided to “respect human rights and fundamental freedoms... for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.” This sets forth a very basic commitment not to discriminate on the basis of gender. Unfortunately, more than thirty years after the Helsinki Final Act, this is not always the case. Our governments do not always work hard enough to prevent or rectify discrimination and abuse of women; law enforcement authorities are sometimes reluctant to respond to cases of domestic violence or rape. We all need to step up efforts to create laws that ensure equal opportunity for women, and to ensure that our political leaders show the will and commitment to implement them. Moreover, in today’s competitive global economy, OSCE States, out of economic self-interest, must draw on and develop the productive potential of all our citizens.

Gender Equality

In June, the OSCE produced its first annual report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. It is important for the OSCE to lead by example in this area. The report showed progress in terms of the number of women employed by the OSCE, and we agree on its conclusion of the need to continue progress on this, especially in the appointment of qualified women to higher-level posts. We also welcome that the OSCE’s Policy against Sexual Harassment and Discrimination has been revised. In this regard, the role of senior management is crucial. Senior management must be trained and held accountable for the implementation of directives such as the policy against harassment

Such standards should also be upheld in our own countries. OSCE States have committed themselves to “encourage measures effectively to ensure full economic opportunity for women, including non-discriminatory employment policies and practices.” Despite this commitment, women in some OSCE States still face invasive personal questions during interviews, or sexual harassment after obtaining employment, and women lack the legal tools to call to account those employers or co-workers who use such discriminatory tactics. Several OSCE States, including Armenia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Belarus and Russia, do not even have specific laws against sexual harassment and should act to correct this legal gap in protection at the work place.

Prevention of Violence Against Women

The United States continues to support increased OSCE efforts to combat domestic violence. No state is immune from the problem; in many OSCE States more than 30% of women report being victims of domestic violence. Effectively addressing domestic violence requires a legal framework that provides accountability for abusers and fosters the ability of authorities or civil society to respond to a victim's pleas for help. The United States welcomes Georgia's new law on crimes committed within the family, which defines domestic violence as a crime and provides for a system of court orders to protect the victims. We ask that ODIHR look into ways that the OSCE could assist Georgia in implementing this new law, such as training social workers to monitor cases and establishing shelters. We also congratulate Bulgaria for its newly adopted Protection Against Domestic Violence Act. Unfortunately, once again this year, we must point out that, while some countries may prosecute domestic violence under other laws, several states, including Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, and Uzbekistan, do not explicitly define domestic violence as a crime. We urge these governments to make it a priority to strengthen related laws and we ask that ODIHR work with these States to assist where necessary.

Finally, we again urge the governments of Georgia and Kyrgyzstan to take immediate action to eliminate the practice of abductions and forced marriages of young women.