



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN AND MEN**

**Statement Delivered by Ambassador Pamela Hyde Smith  
U.S. Delegation to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
October 8, 2003**

Mr. Moderator, in May this body gathered here in Warsaw for a Supplementary Human Dimension seminar on Women's Participation in Public and Economic Life, as was noted. The U.S. delegation appreciates that discussion and hopes that some of the themes raised at that time will be raised here as well. In particular, equality of opportunity for women and men cannot be separated from the development of democratic institutions, free and fair elections, the rule of law, and respect for fundamental freedoms. Equality depends on the existence of a vibrant democracy in which all citizens can demand their rights; in fact, vibrant democracy cannot exist without the full participation of all its citizens, including women. Increased political participation of women is an important component of strengthening democracy and essential in meeting OSCE commitments with regard to equal opportunity. At Moscow we committed ourselves to "encourage and promote equal opportunity for free participation by women in all aspects of political and public life, in decision-making processes, and in international co-operation in general."

Women and men have an identical set of political rights and are entitled to have equal opportunities to participate in the political process. Laws or regulations that discriminate against women and prevent them from participating in the political process violate women's inalienable rights and should be eliminated. Holding governments responsible for protecting against such violations is an important function of any society governed by the rule of law. This is at the core of building a civil, law-abiding society, a prerequisite for true democracies. A society that excludes women from full political participation stifles its own development. Ensuring women's political participation not only strengthens democracy, but also bolsters prosperity, enhances stability, and encourages tolerance.

Role models for the next generation of women leaders serve as an important stimulus to greater political access for NGOs and other women in civil society. Every OSCE participating State could benefit from increased political participation by women. Except for the Nordic states, in no region of the world does female representation in parliaments exceed 14%.

The United States seeks to broaden women's political participation in many ways. Our policy supports the right of all people to take part in the government of his or her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives, and seeks to ensure that women and men actively participate in voting, advocacy and governance in their local and national arenas. Both domestically and abroad, U.S.-funded programs provide civic and legal education to raise awareness of citizens' rights, and train women to run for office and lead non-governmental organizations. Throughout the world, U.S. initiatives help remove institutional legal barriers to political participation by women, increase women's access to resources, and expand women's political skills.

The United States is deeply committed to advancing equality for women and men. We will sponsor a resolution on “Women and Political Participation” at the fall 2003 UN General Assembly. Political participation involves not only voting, but also advocating, governing, serving in elected and appointed positions, and being involved in decision-making processes, including conflict prevention and resolution processes. The U.S. resolution calls on states to eliminate laws and regulations that discriminate against women and prevent them from participating in the political process and to promote equal access to education, information technology, and economic opportunities that enable women to take part fully in the decision-making process.

The OSCE is in a unique position to promote equality of access to political process and help to increase women’s participation. We encourage the OSCE to assist in voter raising-awareness campaigns to reach out both to women and men. We encourage the OSCE to conduct leadership training seminars and to reach out to women to participate actively in other OSCE training, such as judicial, legislative and human rights training. OSCE participating States can and must immediately take action to eliminate barriers that prevent full access to the political process and to ensure equal participation of women in all aspects of the democratic process. It is vitally important that OSCE participating States build strong civil societies, enforce respect for human rights, ensure the rule of law, and provide opportunities for everyone to participate fully in the political process and in civil society.