



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1249 Vienna, 28 November 2019**

## **EU Statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women**

On 25th November, we marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. This also marked the beginning of 16 days of activism in addressing violence against women, this year focusing on rape.

On this occasion, we reaffirm our long lasting commitment to ending violence against women and girls. We would also like to recall that in 2017, the Council of the European Union adopted its decisions to sign the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). When it comes to our global commitment, we highlight the joint EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, launched in 2017, which targets sexual and gender-based violence, addressing female trafficking, domestic violence, and femicide. This project demonstrates that it can be highly effective to work in partnerships and we call on all partners to join the EU-UN Spotlight initiative.

Violence against women and girls continues to be a serious obstacle to achieving equality, development, peace as well as an obstacle to the fulfillment of women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights. The SDGs – and the aim to leave no one behind - cannot be achieved without putting an end to this violence. The issue of rape and all types of violence against women and girls is of outmost concern to all of us on a personal, national and on an international level.

Far too often perpetrators of rape go unreported or unpunished. For women to report in the first place requires a great deal of resilience to re-live the attack, a certain amount of knowledge of where to go, and a degree of confidence in the responsiveness of the services sought. Adding to this issue is the fact that victims of rape risk facing strong

stigmas and victim blaming when reporting sexual assault. This causes significant impunity for perpetrators.

We must put an end to stigma, victim blaming and impunity. Perpetrators of rape must be held accountable. By prosecuting sexual violence cases, we recognize these acts as crimes and send a strong message of zero-tolerance. Progress requires that we tackle the institutional and structural barriers related to this issue. The police and judicial institutions, and the broader security sector, need to be equipped with the right tools to be able to protect victims of rape. Enforcement of laws addressing violence against women and more women in law enforcement are two important measures that have proven to make an effective difference.

Rape is an issue both in times of peace and throughout the conflict cycle and has been used as a weapon of war and oppression throughout history. It has been used to degrade women and their communities as well as for ethnic cleansing and genocide. It traumatizes persons, families and populations and suppresses voice, agency and participation. Sexual violence impedes sustainable peace and security, social cohesion and economic development, and therefore prevention of rape and sexual violence in conflict must remain a priority for the OSCE and its comprehensive security framework.

No further generations should struggle to cope with the scars caused by such actions. We are pleased that we adopted a Ministerial Council Decision on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women in 2018. This decision provides a collective commitment to address the shocking prevalence of gender-based violence against women and girls that continues to persist. Not only does this impair enjoyment of human rights, but it also prevents women from reaching and contributing their full potential, and, as evidence shows, an increased prevalence of such violence is an early warning of conflict and emergency situations. The Milan Decision also recognises the importance of engaging men and boys in addressing the root causes of gender inequality and violence as well as raising awareness about the impact of negative attitudes, behaviours and gender stereotypes. We also wish to recall the Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/04 on the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and Ministerial Council Decisions No. 15/05 and No. 7/14. In this

respect, we highlight the OSCE's MenEngage and the Women Ambassadors network for their efforts in raising awareness on women's rights and in promoting gender equality.

Implementation remains the key challenge for the full elimination of violence against women and girls. To bridge the implementation gap more efforts for collecting data and establishing efficient monitoring mechanisms are essential. We reiterate our support for the OSCE-led survey on Well-being and Safety of Women and its findings, and we encourage all participating States to follow up on its recommendations.

The EU encourages participating States to collectively continue to build on, and strengthen, the principles and commitments that are already in place. It is completely unacceptable that most incidents of conflict and non-conflict related sexual violence, including rape, are not brought to justice. Together we must continue taking practical steps towards the effective elimination of all types of gender based and sexual violence.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA, GEORGIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.