



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1272 Vienna, 18 June 2020

EU Statement on occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict on 19 June 2020, the European Union calls on the international community to accelerate its efforts to eliminate all forms of sexual violence, including as a strategy and tactic of war and terror. We commend the Albanian Chairmanship for raising this important topic as a current issue on the Agenda of this week's Permanent Council.

Sexual violence in conflict constitutes a flagrant and unacceptable violation of human rights and international humanitarian law. Such violence has devastating physical, psychological and social consequences, and impedes sustainable peace and security, social cohesion and economic development. The European Union reaffirms its position of zero tolerance towards sexual violence - in any way, shape or form.

Conflict-related sexual violence has a long-lasting effect on local communities and societies at large. If not addressed and victims not supported, it can undermine peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. The OSCE, as the world's largest regional security organisation, must ensure that the policy to eliminate sexual violence is mainstreamed and implemented in its peacebuilding activities, including in post-conflict scenarios. Together with the broader international community, we must continue to challenge unacceptable attitudes, norms and behaviour that condone or justify sexual violence.

The EU recalls that UN Security Council Resolution 1820 states that the use of sexual violence in conflict can constitute a war crime and a crime against humanity. It can impact the international peace and security. This is also set out in the Rome Statute of 1998, which governs the work of the International Criminal Court.

The EU recognises and supports the important contribution of women's organisations, civil society and activists who on a daily basis mobilize for this cause and are the true voices of change. The EU will continue working with international partners and civil society actors to ensure respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights in peacebuilding efforts worldwide.

It is concerning that fear and stigma prevent the vast majority of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence from reporting it. Practitioners in the field estimate that for each conflict-related rape reported, 10-20 cases go undocumented. All survivors and witnesses, in particular women and children, must be guaranteed protection, as well as access to comprehensive psychological, sexual and reproductive health care services. At the same time, we should not forget that also men and boys can be survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Strengthening the accountability for these crimes is crucial. We expect participating States to conduct effective investigations of these crimes, bring perpetrators to justice, ensure accountability, and provide all victims with safe and unhindered access to justice and adequate redress and reparations. Prevention, protection and prosecution should be the driving forces of all our efforts.

The COVID-19 pandemic may adversely impact the capacity of law enforcement and judicial authorities to receive and process reports on incidents of sexual violence. It is our duty to guarantee that access to medical, psycho-social and legal services is ensured, notwithstanding the circumstances of the pandemic.

The EU calls on all participating States to duly assume their responsibilities towards all their citizens. In this regard, we underline the importance of equal and meaningful participation of women in crisis response. Inclusive decision-making processes are vital in enabling comprehensive security for all.

We wish to underline the necessity for full and comprehensive implementation of Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/04 on the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and of all other Ministerial Council Decisions related to this topic.

The EU underlines the important role of the OSCE in the implementation of the Women Peace and Security agenda. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the UN Security Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security and we call on the OSCE and the participating States to increase their efforts for reaching its full implementation, on a national, regional and global level.

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.