



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1321 Vienna, 24 June 2021

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

On 19 June, we commemorated the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. Sexual violence in conflict constitutes a flagrant and unacceptable violation of human rights and international humanitarian law. Such violence has devastating long-term 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 and calls on the international community to accelerate its efforts to eliminate all forms of sexual violence, including as a strategy and as a tactic of war and terror.

Conflict-related sexual violence has a long-lasting effect on local communities and societies at large and can undermine peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts if it remains unaddressed. The OSCE, as the world's largest regional security organisation, must ensure that the elimination of any form of sexual violence is mainstreamed and implemented in its peacebuilding activities, including in post-conflict scenarios. 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 adversely impact 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 values, recognises and supports the important contribution of civil society and activists as well as women's organisations, and human rights defenders, who on a daily basis mobilize for this cause and are the true voices of change. The EU will continue working with these important partners. We look forward to the high-level meeting of the Generation Equality Forum in Paris from 30 June to 2 July, which provides an opportunity to accelerate the work to end sexual violence in peacetime, as well as during conflict by mobilizing states and other stakeholders.

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. As stated by the UN Secretary General, we cannot allow this already underreported crime to slip further into the shadows. Victims must be heard as well as assisted and protected. This chronic underreporting has been compounded by COVID-19 containment measures. The pandemic amplified gender-based inequality and led to a global spike in gender-based violence - as recognized in the UN Secretary General report on conflict-related sexual violence. Lockdowns, curfews, quarantines, fears of contracting or transmitting the virus, mobility restrictions, and limited access to services and safe spaces, as shelters closed and clinics were repurposed for the pandemic response, added a layer of complexity to existing structural, institutional and sociocultural barriers to reporting. A gender-responsive and inclusive global recovery from COVID-19 should promote a new social contract in which no one is above the law, and no one beneath its protection.

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. Prevention, protection and prosecution should be the driving forces of all our efforts. In this regard, we underline the importance of equal, full 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 reiterates the important role of the OSCE in the implementation of the Women Peace and Security agenda and calls on all 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, 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.