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PC.DEL/255/24
7 March 2024
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ENGLISH only

1464th Meeting of the Permanent Council
7 March 2024

**Joint Nordic-Baltic Statement on International Women's Day
Delivered by Ambassador Kaja Tael
Vienna, 7 March 2024**

Madam Chair,

In addition to the statements already delivered on our behalf, I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, and my own country Estonia.

We are happy to join other participating States in marking this year's International Women's Day. For most, this is a day of celebration. A day to celebrate women around the world, in all their diversity, their achievements, and their resilience in the face of adversity and discrimination. It is a day to celebrate those who paved the way for women today.

Yet, this is also a day to recognize how far we have left to go. And to acknowledge that women around the world still face systematic and normative barriers to their political participation and economic empowerment. It is also a day to amplify the voices of those who face oppression and violence, both offline and online.

Nowhere in the OSCE region is women's hardship currently more evident than in Ukraine, where women and girls are facing the cruel and disproportionate impact of Russia's unprovoked, unjustifiable and illegal war of aggression. The war has led to massive displacement of women and girls, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking and to sexual and gender-based violence. For those who have remained in Ukraine, the war continues to impact their daily lives in harrowing ways. Yet, Ukrainian women have also demonstrated great resilience and agency, playing an integral role in the security sector, in humanitarian relief, as well as in civil society.

Madam Chair,

Global democratic backsliding goes hand-in-hand with regressive, anti-gender movements that threaten progress towards achieving gender equality. In a time of democratic backsliding and rising authoritarianism, we must do our utmost to fight setbacks, and protect the values of democracy, freedom, human rights, and gender equality. Without a concerted effort to reverse today's worrying trends, we risk witnessing decades of progress vanishing into thin air.

To reverse the current trend, we must continue to argue for the central role of women in all matters of peace and security, and continue to deliver on our commitment to gender equality – *every* day. While our countries rank high on the Global Gender Gap Index, challenges remain, and there is still much work to be done to achieve full gender equality. Equal pay is, for instance, not a reality in our countries. The unequal distribution of unpaid care work between men and women is another example where we are far from achieving full gender equality.

Ensuring fairness and non-discrimination is only possible when applying a gender transformative approach in all policy- and decision-making. Gender equality can only be achieved when discriminatory structures, social norms, and gender stereotypes are overcome. Men and boys, in all their diversity, must engage in this work – as agents of change as well as beneficiaries of gender equality, investing in an inclusive and positive masculinity.

Madam Chair,

The theme of this year's International Women's Day is investing in women to accelerate progress. Our message here today is that investing in the OSCE will bring us one step closer in achieving gender equality in our region. From ODIHR's Change project or the Secretariat's WIN project, to the expansive work of the field missions, we have the structures and expertise needed to accelerate progress in gender-equality. What the OSCE requires, however, is adequate funding, both with regards to the Unified Budget, as well as Extra-Budgetary projects. A swift adoption of the Unified Budget and the mobilization of funding for Extra-Budgetary projects will allow us to capitalize on the OSCE's important role in promoting gender equality, and unlock women's full potential in the region.

Madam Chair, distinguished colleagues,

There can be no sustainable development without gender equality, no comprehensive security without gender equality, no true democracy, and no lasting peace.

While gender equality is a human *right*, progress in gender equality is a political *choice*. We *must* increase our efforts to promote the full enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls. In doing so, we must address the root causes of gender inequality, apply transformative approaches, and enhance our preventive measures. Our democracies, societies, and the security in our region, depends upon it – and *all* of us profit from it.

I thank you.