

International Day of the Girl: Joint statement to the OSCE

Mr Chair,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and my own country, Canada.

On October 11th, the global community commemorated the 10th anniversary of the International Day of the Girl. In 2012, Canada tabled UNGA resolution 66/170 whereby states agreed to dedicate this day to celebrating the voices and power of girls, championing their rights worldwide, and reflecting on the challenges they continue to face because of their gender.

Over the past ten years, we have seen a growing recognition that the empowerment of and investment in girls is integral to achieving each of the Sustainable Development Goals. We have acknowledged repeatedly that the meaningful participation of girls in decisions that affect them is essential to breaking cycles of discrimination and violence. OSCE participating States have consistently underlined that gender equality and ending violence against women and girls is vital to fulfilling OSCE commitments. Through the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security agendas, we have accepted that it is impossible to achieve lasting peace if you exclude half of society from the process.

Over the past ten years, we have witnessed girls acting as agents of change in their communities and far beyond. They are leading the way as students, entrepreneurs, volunteers and activists, and proving that you are never too young to shape the future and improve the lives of others.

Yet, girls remain at risk and their voices are too often ignored.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing gender inequalities. It has put girls at higher risk of early marriage due to a combination of economic shocks, school closures and interruptions in reproductive health services. Up to 10 million girls worldwide are at risk of child marriage.

Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine is having a devastating impact on the safety and security of women and girls. The aggression against Ukraine must end.

Mr Chair, we know that violence against women and girls further escalates in both scale and severity in situations of conflict and crisis. The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, ODIHR and the OSCE Moscow Mechanism have documented egregious cases of sexual and gender based violence perpetrated against women and girls by Russian troops. Women and girls make up the majority of the almost 14 million IDPs and refugees who have been driven from their homes by Russian aggression. Women and girls are the most at risk for human trafficking. All of these risks are exacerbated

where there are intersectional vulnerabilities such as for persons with disabilities; LGBTQI people; and members of racial and ethnic minorities.

Outside the OSCE region, in Iran, we have witnessed the reprehensible detention and death of a young woman, Mahsa Amini, as a direct result of the systemic repression of women and girls in Iran. In the ensuing weeks, we have witnessed the courage of young Iranian women and girls – and the men and boys who have joined them as allies – as they have peacefully protested and fought for their human rights and for their rightful role in Iranian society and government. We stand in solidarity with Iranian women and girls.

Mr Chair, we know what needs to be done. The human rights of all girls must be respected. They must be heard and given a meaningful voice in decision-making.

We must ensure that girls are not attacked, violated, abused or silenced. Our future depends upon it.

Thank you very much Mr Chair.