

**Remarks As Delivered by U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary
Matthew D. Steinhelfer:
OSCE Security Dialogue on
“Women, Peace and Security and the Conflict Cycle”
Wednesday, March 8, 2023, 10:00 A.M.**

Thank you very much for the introduction and good morning.

Let me first express my sincerest appreciation to the Chairs for convening this joint FSC and PC meeting today.

Having started my career in my government’s Global Women’s Issues Office, I am honored to be with you. I’ve been a longtime advocate of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. I would acknowledge at the top that more men are needed to be supporters of improved gender equity, equality, and inclusion.

This is a critical policy conversation - not just for International Women’s Day, but every day.

Many of us frequently cite the long-standing research that shows we achieve better, longer-lasting outcomes across multiple sectors, when women meaningfully participate.

But my message is this: we have more progress to achieve. And to do so, we must work collectively to strengthen our tools and approaches to fit complex global challenges.

So, OSCE’s comprehensive and inclusive approach puts it at the forefront of effective and flexible response to conflict and war.

This is why I was eager to participate today. And today, I’d like to share a bit about the United States’ approach to supporting the important role of women, in all their diversity, in early warning and conflict prevention.

And just as important, I am eager to listen and to learn from my distinguished co-panelists.

At the top, I should acknowledge that conflict is neither linear nor homogenous. It affects different persons in different locations in different ways. And so therefore, we must carefully consider the varying effects on different populations, such as women and girls.

So, Four points.

First: For effective early warning and prevention, **we must mainstream gender considerations and facilitate women's meaningful participation from the outset.**

Women and girls, in all of their diversity, are often the first to experience the instability that arises from early warning signs of conflict, such as gender-based violence, poverty, and restriction of movement and physical security.

As care providers, teachers, and civil society leaders, women have a window to notice rising tensions in their communities and the sub-national political, economic, and social challenges that can feed the roots of violence and conflict.

My bureau in the U.S. State Department financed an analysis of how to integrate gender-sensitive indicators into local, national, regional, and global early warning systems for violence and conflict.

One key report recommendation was to link broader peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities with women's networks, as well as those who face a heightened risk of violence, such as members of ethnic and religious minority groups. But, we have more work ahead to put these findings into action.

To that end, the U.S. government is working to institutionalize and mainstream gender. My colleagues are conducting regular trainings on gender analysis, equipping projects with gender experts, and establishing expectations for inclusion in our programming.

In Ukraine for example, my bureau is advancing support to combat veterans and internally displaced persons. From the onset, we mainstreamed gender into the program design and specific project activities. This initiative reinforced that our

WPS conversations should not only overtly focus on mitigating risks – they should also focus on supporting opportunities.

In Ukraine, we are seeing that Russia's war is forging strong and experienced women leaders, who will be essential to Ukraine winning the war, achieving a just peace, and boldly rebuilding.

Among internally displaced persons in particular, we have found that women both volunteer to support their communities at high rates and are highly effective when they do so.

Second: We cannot afford to be in 'reactive mode,' or focus overtly on early-warning signs of violence or atrocities. We must also move our work upstream, towards prevention. We have the opportunity to leverage technology in this endeavor. But to do so, we must **address existing gender data gaps**.

My team of data scientists in Washington has taught me about the importance of collecting sub-annual and sub-national data in order to build systematic forecasting models.

Tracking subnational trends in gender-sensitive indicators is vital for rapid assessment of growing tensions, insecurity, or risks of violence.

Unfortunately, global datasets with subnational, and sub-annual data on WPS issues are rare. Therefore, we need to step up joint and national efforts to collect more gender-disaggregated and gender-relevant data.

Now, we recognize data are often difficult to collect, and subjective matters such as levels of empowerment and agency are often not easily measured. But if we are to move our work towards prevention, we must tackle the complex problems.

To that end, my bureau is proud to participate in the United Nations' Complex Risk Analytics Fund – a multi-donor trust fund focused on facilitating access to and developing new data and analytic tools relevant to the conflict-humanitarian-peace nexus. The United States is committed to working together with partners to fill data gaps and amplify solutions, including those related to gender.

Third, if we mainstream gender and tackle the gender data gaps, then what next? Well, we must **sustain prevention investments**.

Prevention efforts should not just come at the beginning of the conflict cycle, but also be maintained during and in the aftermath of conflict or war. Sustaining prevention initiatives is essential to achieving lasting effects and ensure backsliding is noticed before it is too late. Once again, conflict is rarely linear.

OSCE's field missions play an important role in advancing preventative action through their direct links to the situation on the ground. They sustain regular contact with host governments and with local civil society.

In particular, the OSCE provides important technical assistance and capacity building to support the development and implementation of WPS National and Local Action Plans throughout the OSCE region.

Our friends in the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre sustain close collaboration with the OSCE's Gender Unit, field operations, and Special Representatives to mainstream women's participation and gender perspectives, needs, and contributions throughout the conflict cycle. We commend this important collaboration.

We also applaud OSCE's efforts to support the next generation of women peacebuilders and gender experts.

The United States supports the OSCE's WIN Project, entitled Women and Men Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality. This Project strengthens and incubates networks to foster women's participation and leadership and promotes men's engagement in gender equality within the OSCE area.

Recently, the WIN project connected women activists from Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina for a series of conversations on addressing gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence. This is vital work. The exchange of knowledge enables better response and support for survivors, as well as fosters a climate of accountability.

Fourth and finally, we must prioritize women’s meaningful participation across the conflict cycle, including transitional phases.

My bureau houses the State Department’s Negotiations Support Unit, which advises U.S. diplomats and informs program design on negotiations issues at every stage of peace processes and conflict transitions. Time and again, we see that the earlier we can increase meaningful participation and capacity of women — negotiators, agreement monitors, civil society facilitators, and government officials — the more durable the peace will be.

We applaud the vast contributions of the women of Ukraine who have championed their country’s cause in myriad ways. From early warning to humanitarian response, to government leadership, to the frontlines. These contributions and sustained leadership from women will pay incredible dividends when Ukraine recovers from Russia’s illegal invasion.

So, in conclusion, a focus on strengthening implementation of the WPS agenda within the OSCE’s conflict cycle toolbox is an integral part of stepping up collective efforts to promote peace and security.

And we in the United States continue to support the OSCE’s work to advance better outcomes through the WPS agenda.

Thank you very much for allowing me to join you today.

And I look forward to hearing from my fellow panelists.