

AN APPEAL TO ACT: ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS AND POLITICIANS

In my role as the Special Representative on Gender Issues, I call on parliamentarians, participating States, and the OSCE PA to take action to address the growing crisis of violence against women journalists and politicians in the OSCE region.

As outlined in my 2021 annual report, *Violence against Women Journalists and Politicians: A Growing Crisis*, women in journalism and politics face widespread and intensifying violence. The range of behaviour they can experience includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, and an increasing share of this violence is now taking place online. This phenomenon endangers women, puts the wellbeing of our societies and democracies at risk, and threatens to undermine progress toward gender equality.

Violence against women journalists and politicians appears to be fuelled by the broader global context: we see democratic backsliding and a rise in authoritarian policies in some OSCE participating States, and this is often accompanied by a resurgence of patriarchal values, intolerance, and misogyny. This violence is also fed by toxic masculinity – gender norms that teach boys and men they are valued for being tough, unemotional, and sexual – which promotes the view that influential and powerful women undermine men’s identity and role in society.

Women’s movements, such as the #MeToo movement, are powerful drivers of global and national action to advance awareness of the impact of gender-based violence on women in all aspects of their lives, including in the workplace.

Yet, despite growing awareness of the problem, in OSCE PA countries and globally, the scourge of violence against women journalists and politicians remains ever present. Therefore, I issue this appeal to act and put forward the following recommendations.

Parliamentarians of OSCE PA participating States should demand that their parliaments take the following actions:

- Establish or review parliamentary codes of conduct to ensure they incorporate gender considerations and are effective in responding to gender-based violence – including misogynistic and abusive comments – against parliamentarians and staff.
- Create a dedicated team or an independent office within parliament to deal with complaints related to violence against women in politics.
- Establish a cross-party working group on violence and harassment in parliament that includes parliamentarians, representatives of parliamentary staff, and sexual violence experts.
- Deliver gender-sensitivity and sexual harassment training – and consider making it compulsory – to parliamentarians.
- Conduct a confidential survey for parliamentarians to better understand their experience with all forms of violence.
- Request that the parliamentary security service, or the body responsible for parliamentary security, implement protective measures at the offices and homes of all parliamentarians.

Parliamentarians of participating States must encourage their governments to:

- Collect disaggregated data on the prevalence of violence against women journalists and politicians to ensure that any action taken is effective, inclusive and evidence-based.
- Provide sustainable funding to women’s organizations that fight to end gender-based violence and offer support services to women survivors, including women journalists and politicians.
- Develop or review existing legislation to prohibit gender-based violence against women journalists and politicians, and in particular, to address the unique challenges of violence in the online realm.
- Move to incorporate gender as a protected characteristic in hate crime legislation to allow for misogyny to be labeled and prosecuted as a hate crime.
- Review electoral laws to ensure they address violence against women and its impact on the democratic process.
- Ensure government’s work on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda incorporates the perspective that women’s participation as journalists and politicians in post-conflict democratization processes is key to the success of the WPS agenda.
- Provide funding to civil society organizations that support women’s participation in politics.

The Secretariat of the OSCE PA should implement the following concrete measures to address violence against women journalists and politicians in the region:

- Develop guiding documents for parliamentarians to help them develop and review legislation with the specific goal of addressing the violence experienced by women journalists and politicians.
- Collaborate with media and political institutions to develop interventions that encourage men to act as allies to end all forms of violence against women in journalism and politics.
- Lead efforts to collect and publish data on abuse targeting women journalists and politicians, and ensure that such data is disaggregated to reflect the experiences of women of all different backgrounds and identities.
- Consider developing a group for women parliamentarians, from OSCE PA participating States, who have experienced intimidation, harassment and violence. The group could provide women with peer support and access to services, and could also be consulted by the wider membership of the OSCE PA on relevant questions.
- Conduct research, specific to the OSCE region, to inform the development of a guide on how to address violence against women during the electoral process.
- Provide training to election observers to detect and report acts of violence against women in politics.
- Develop a forum for parliamentarians and journalists to meet twice a year with the goal of discussing violence against women in these fields, and other relevant issues.

I urge all parliamentarians, participating States, and the OSCE PA to take the above recommendations into serious consideration as we respond to the growing crisis of violence against women journalists and politicians. Gender-based violence must not be the cost for women working in the fields of journalism and politics.

**The Honourable Dr. Hedy Fry, P.C., MP
OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues**