

International Women's Day 2026: UK statement to the OSCE

5.3.2026 - Neil Holland | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Ambassador Holland marks International Women's Day 2026 by reaffirming that the security, prosperity and stability of the OSCE region depends on the full, equal and safe participation of women and girls.

Thank you, Mr Chair. And thank you very much Dr Schläppi for your interesting presentation and overview of the work of the CEDAW Committee, which the United Kingdom fully supports.

The security, prosperity and stability of our region depends on the full, equal and safe participation of women and girls. The global trajectory remains deeply concerning. Across our region and beyond, rights are being eroded, women human rights defenders face increasing intimidation, and violence against women and girls continues to rise. These challenges demand sustained, collective action.

Violence against women and girls is a global emergency. One in three women and girls worldwide continues to experience violence in her lifetime. Such violence undermines democratic institutions, fuels instability, and weakens every pillar of the OSCE's comprehensive security approach. It is preventable — but only if we act with urgency and consistency.

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine continues to inflict profound harm on women and girls. Evidence of conflict-related sexual violence by Russian forces has been extensively documented, with women and girls facing heightened risks in areas affected by the conflict. CRSV is not incidental, it is organised, deliberate, and used to break societal cohesion and erode the will to fight and recover. Russia's aggression is not only an assault on Ukraine's sovereignty; it is an assault on the safety, dignity and rights of women and girls.

This year's International Women's Day theme, "Give To Gain", underscores the principle that meaningful progress on gender equality requires deliberate contributions from governments, institutions and individuals. When we invest in women's safety, rights and leadership, we strengthen societies as a whole. The campaign's message is clear: gender equality is not a concession, but a collective benefit.

The OSCE has the mandate and tools to help drive this collective effort. It is vital that participating States match commitments with action by defending women's rights in negotiations, resourcing women peacebuilders, and confronting the rising use of digital technologies to perpetrate online harassment and abuse.

The United Kingdom remains committed to advancing this agenda. Last December, the Foreign Secretary launched 'All In', an initiative bringing together global leaders and experts to galvanise new commitments to end violence against women and girls. This initiative complements the UK's long-standing investment in evidence-based prevention, including the 'What Works to Prevent Violence' programme, which has demonstrated that violence can be reduced by up to half in participating communities.

We will also continue to champion the Women, Peace and Security agenda. As conflicts intensify, the risks to women and girls — including conflict-related sexual violence — increase. All participating States should support survivor-centred approaches, strengthen accountability, and protect the

essential role of women mediators and civil society actors. The UK is committed to supporting accountability, including through our Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative by which the UK aims to strengthen access to justice for all survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

International Women's Day is not simply a commemoration. It is a call to action — to defend the gains already made, confront the challenges ahead, and accelerate efforts to build a region where every woman and girl can live free from violence, fear and discrimination, and where their full participation is recognised as indispensable to our shared security.

Thank you.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/international-womens-day-2026-uk-statement-to-the-osce>