

**OAS Event on
“Gender, Peace and Security”**

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**Keynote Speech by H.E. Aurelia Frick,
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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to thank His Excellency Ambassador Mendez for the warm welcome, and our partners for collaborating with us in putting together this event. Gender, peace and security is an issue that is especially close to my heart. It therefore means a lot to me to be able to present you with my perspective in this regard.

Liechtenstein has been a Permanent Observer of the OAS since January 2014. Within the limited possibilities, we have focused from the beginning of our observer status in particular on questions that concern the promotion and protection of human rights, including gender issues. For a country like Liechtenstein, it makes a lot of sense to pursue the same priorities within different multilateral fora where we can make a useful contribution.

At the outset, you might wonder what a small country like Liechtenstein, a country without armed forces no less, could possibly contribute to a discussion on gender, peace and security. The answer may surprise you: quite a lot!

This is because during our 25 years of membership in the United Nations we have always been a proactive delegation.

We may not have the size nor the resources to be engaged on all issues that our world faces, but we certainly have the necessary commitment and dynamism to help shape policy discussions in a number of carefully selected priority issues. The empowerment of women, women's human rights, and women in conflict have long been such priorities.

Ambassador Claudia Fritsche, who was our first Permanent Representative to the United Nations starting in 1990, has been our flag-bearer on this issue from day one. She has led an informal group of women Ambassadors in New York for many years, pushing for greater inclusion of women in the upper echelons of the United Nations Secretariat. More importantly for us today, she has also been a tireless advocate for the Security Council's Agenda on Women, Peace and Security.

In recent years, Liechtenstein has worked hard to help implement this important agenda. We are supporting a number of important and concrete civil society initiatives in this regard. For example, we have supported the so-called Monthly Action Points, which provide concrete recommendations for Security Council members on how to apply the Agenda in specific situations. We have supported organizations such as the Geneva-based Dialogue Advisory Group, which facilitates dialogue among conflict parties and in doing so, actively promotes the voices of women. We have even helped create a smartphone app on Women, Peace and Security!

But I am not here today to advertise our many initiatives. What I would rather do is share with you some of the insights and conclusions we have drawn from our many years of engagement on this issue. In doing so, I will draw on the experience from another Liechtenstein initiative – and I promise this will be the last Liechtenstein initiative I mention today:

Only a few months ago, I had the pleasure of presiding over a panel discussion at UN Headquarters in New York, which was the last event in series organized by Liechtenstein over almost three years. We had put together this lecture series on Women, Peace and Security with the aim of deepening the dialogue at UN Headquarters on the issue – beyond the formal, and sometimes sterile, debates in the Security Council.

We were able to create a unique and informal space for discussion, and to give a platform to civil society activists from the field – such as women human rights defenders from Syria, Ukraine, Nigeria and the Korean Peninsula. Today, I would like to share with you what I see as the outcome of this process.

The main purpose of the process was to boost the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. The agenda sets out a comprehensive vision of how to include women in peaceful solutions, and how to protect them from the effects of armed conflict – in itself a remarkable achievement. Yet we have largely been unable to fulfill the promise made fifteen years ago. Girls born into a post 1325-world still suffer from abuse, sexual violence, forced recruitment and displacement. The 15th anniversary of the Security Council resolution 1325 last year was therefore a bittersweet moment.

So, what can we do to improve implementation? Five key points come to mind:

First and foremost, we cannot rely on the UN Security Council alone.

Gender-based discrimination, political exclusion and violence against women sadly are problems in every society, in every country. These problems are exacerbated in conflict situations – making women even more vulnerable, and excluding them from peace processes. Studies also suggest that rising levels of violence against women are quite reliable indicators of impending conflicts. To fully address these truly global problems, we must involve other stakeholders and use other processes within and outside of the UN. I am particularly happy that I can state this right here, at the Organization of American States. Clearly, the OAS can be a major catalyst for this agenda. Also at the UN, we have created new opportunities and catalysts, especially through the 2030 Agenda. SDG 5 on gender equality is a big achievement. Also goal 16 on peaceful societies offers an excellent platform to advance the agenda. Another big opportunity is the World Humanitarian Summit in May this year. Women's full and equal participation should be at the very center of the Summit's outcome. We know that this will enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian aid, and enhance the sustainability of peace.

Second, personal leadership is key.

The WPS agenda needs real champions – among States, in the field, in the Secretariat. One such champion, the ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, was the first speaker at our series in New York. She has been a fantastic advocate and has made the fight against sexual violence her priority.

Another good example was Hilde Johnson. As the new Special Representative for South Sudan, she requested the highest number of gender advisors ever in any mission – with success. This shows that we should not too easily accept the pretext that there are not enough funds for women, peace and security.

Lastly, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon himself has been a leader in placing women in leadership positions. He has been a true “he for she”. I have high hopes that his successor will be a she for she.

Third, we must be better connected to actors in the field.

At one of our events, a women’s rights activist from the DRC said that policy-makers at the UN were utterly detached from what is happening on the ground. Through our series, we have tried to change that, at least to some extent. Women in conflict know best what they need. They are the ones making the difference. We thus need to empower local women’s organizations and listen to their voices. Let us do this in particular as we get ready for the World Humanitarian Summit in May.

Fourth, we must end impunity.

Armed conflicts bring out the worst in humans. And they lead to the most horrendous crimes. Sadly, women are increasingly targeted in armed conflict, in particular as victims of gender-based violence. Such crimes simply cannot go unpunished. To make matters worse, survivors of gender-based violence often face stigmatization and threats, which prevents them from reporting the crimes. The lack of accountability is all too easily seen as silent acceptance of the culture of impunity around gender-based and sexual violence.

We need to do more to support transitional and ad-hoc justice mechanisms, and in particular lend greater support – and reparations! – to survivors. Perpetrators must no longer have any reason to expect silence. They must expect accountability.

My fifth, and final point: prevention is key.

We all know that investing our money in prevention is the smart thing to do. Yet just compare the global military spending to the funds available for conflict prevention. There is no greater proof of how massively off-balance our priorities are! Some of our national key projects have to do with conflict prevention: For example, we are promoting the Kampala amendments to the Rome Statue, which give the International Criminal Court jurisdiction over the crime of aggression. They will help enforce the prohibition of the illegal use of force – and thus help prevent armed conflicts and the suffering they cause. Also, only a few months ago, Liechtenstein launched a Code of Conduct that will strengthen Security Council action to end or prevent atrocity crimes – which is already supported by 111 countries. These are important investments in prevention, hopefully with long-term results.

In conclusion, let me once again thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am convinced that the Organization of American States has much to contribute to the protection of women in conflict, and to the promotion of women as agents of peace.

I very much look forward to the upcoming panel discussion, and in particular to the launch of the Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit in Spanish. It is gratifying to see that you all are equally invested in this effort. Promoting the WPS agenda is an enormous challenge, but also very rewarding: There is nothing that is more worth fighting for. Thank you all for doing this together.