

***UNMIK Office of Gender Affairs Places Gender Concerns
at the Top of the Peacekeeping Political Agenda in Kosovo***

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Pursuant to the deployment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo under UNSCR 1244, and the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo, Kosovo is an entity under interim international administration. Following the elections of the Kosovo Parliamentary Assembly in November 2001, the administrative responsibility for a wide range of functions was transferred to democratically elected bodies within the Provisional Institutions of Self Government (PISG). On 10th December 2003, the Standards for Kosovo were launched as a means of measuring the progress of the PISG within the "standards before status" policy. They were prepared in close consultation with the PISG and all major local political parties and, depending on quarterly assessments of progress, a first opportunity to comprehensively discuss Kosovo's future status could occur in mid 2005. Subsequently to the leadoff of the Standards for Kosovo, and under the auspices of a Steering Group co-chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary General and the Kosovo Prime Minister, UNMIK and the PISG convened working groups with the task of preparing plans, outlining policies and specific, concrete and measurable steps for the implementation of the eight sets of standards, namely Functioning Democratic Institutions, Rule of Law, Freedom of Movement, Sustainable Returns and the Rights of Communities and their Members, Economy, Property Rights, Dialogue, and Kosovo Protection Corps.

According to its mandate, the UNMIK Office of Gender Affairs is requested to facilitate the mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective into the substantial operations of the Mission and in doing so contribute to the promotion of gender equality in Kosovo. In line with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the Office of Gender Affairs advocated for the inclusion of gender equality goals in the Standards for Kosovo (2003) and the Standards Implementation Plan (2004). For this purpose, the Office of Gender Affairs successfully liaised with key actors in the offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary General, the Principal Deputy SRSG, and the Deputies SRSG for Police and Justice, Civil Administration, Democratization and Institution Building, and Reconstruction, as well as other relevant units, positioning itself as a mission-wide advisory unit on gender issues. The incorporation of a gender focus in the above-mentioned processes represents a crucial achievement for the advancement of the gender equality agenda in Kosovo and a historical improvement from the previous benchmarks. At the same time, it opens up an avenue for comprehensively addressing the issues raised by the UNSCR 1325 in terms of women and men equal participation in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, the need to increase women's involvement in decision-making, and the necessity of full implementing international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls.

Furthermore, the UNMIK Implementation Plan of UNSCR 1325 for 2004-2005 was elaborated by the Office of Gender Affairs with the aim of translating into action the notion of gender mainstreaming as a collective responsibility for which the entire Mission is going to be held accountable. The mentioned plan mirrors the aftermaths of the negotiation between UNMIK and the PISG, held for the integration of gender concerns in the Standards for Kosovo, setting common grounds for the creation of an enabling environment to effectively tackle political, social, economic and cultural gender gaps. In its structuring both national and international instruments were taken into account, namely the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Law on Gender Equality in Kosovo*, and the Standards for Kosovo. Consequently, it is the product of a dialogue exercise, which drawing together the endorsement of a gender equality approach, the adherence to international standards for women's advancement and the embracing of local based needs and interests, ensures empowerment and ownership by all stakeholders in an often contended arena. Therefore, the Office of Gender Affairs fulfilled its *raison d'être* managing to place UNSCR 1325 at the heart of policy making through streamlined strategies.

The UNMIK Office of Gender Affairs will continue performing as a catalyst and a knowledge provider to support the dynamics it has initiated. In particular, it is playing a critical role in the joint implementation of the Standards for Kosovo, in coordination with the Advisory Office on Good Governance, Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Gender Issues of the Prime Minister's Office, as well as in the Standards for Kosovo monitoring and assessment, in collaboration with key actors in UNMIK. In order to reinforce synergies in the light of the gender equality related challenges deriving from the current political scenario, a Coordination Task Force has been set up between the OGA and the Advisory Office of the Prime Minister's Office. This Task Force is meant to uphold institution-building interventions to strengthen the provisional local government competence to foster gender equality and champion for women's voices to be embodied in official talks.

*The UNMIK Office of Gender Affairs supported the Gender Equality Committee of the Kosovo Parliamentary Assembly to conceptualize and draft the Law on Gender Equality, providing advice on both its legal and substantial aspects and facilitating the conditions for knowledge sharing at the regional and international levels. The Law preserves and establishes the gender equality principles as fundamental values for the institutionalization of the democratic system in Kosovo.