

Ladies and gentlemen,
esteemed colleagues,
and dedicated advocates for peace and security,

Thank you to the Finnish Federation of Graduate Women,
the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki,
and to Finland's Women, Peace, and Security Network for the opportunity to give the opening
remarks in this interesting seminar.

Today, we gather to shine a light on a topic of immense importance: "The Future of Women,
Peace, and Security Co-Operation in EU and NATO." This subject is an extremely timely one,
considering the geopolitical shift of our two Nordic EU countries, Finland and Sweden, finally both
being counted among NATO countries, and the ongoing integration of both countries into NATO
operations and decision making. Not to mention the EU elections to be held this June, which are
currently shaping up to be defence and security elections, as an obvious response to Russia's
unprovoked war on Ukraine and thus, the European community at large.

The essence of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda lies in the recognition of women's
unique roles and experiences in conflict and peacebuilding. It acknowledges the disproportionate
impact that war and conflict have on women and girls and emphasizes their crucial contributions to
conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery. The heart of this agenda is the undeniable truth that
sustainable peace cannot be achieved without the full participation and inclusion of women at all
levels of decision-making.

Women, traditionally seen only as victims of war, have shown time and again that they are also
powerful agents of change, capable of leading nations through turmoil to peace. Their roles as
decision-makers in conflict prevention and peacebuilding are not just beneficial; they are essential.

But why does this work matter? Why must we place such emphasis on women's roles within peace
and security?

First, involving women in peace processes increases the likelihood of sustainable and inclusive
peace. Research has shown that peace agreements with female signatories are more durable and
more likely to be implemented. This is not a coincidence. Women bring different perspectives and
priorities to the table, often emphasizing reconciliation, justice, and community welfare, which are
critical components of lasting peace.

Second, women's participation in peace negotiations and conflict resolution leads to more
comprehensive solutions. Women are often at the forefront of community life and possess a deep
understanding of societal needs. Their insights ensure that peace agreements are not only signed
but are relevant and responsive to the needs of all members of society, including the most
vulnerable.

Finland's long standing security concept of comprehensive security builds on this thinking and is an
excellent example of it. In this age of disinformation, hybrid warfare, and election interference, it is
ever more important to build resilience throughout society, on all levels, and in every sector.
Defence and security thinking needs to be augmented by social stability, education, and inclusivity
- topics women have traditionally been more sensitive to.

Ladies and gentlemen, the evidence is clear: when women are involved in peace processes, the
outcomes are more successful and sustainable. Yet, despite this knowledge, women remain
underrepresented in peace and security roles. This must change. We must commit to removing the
systemic barriers that hinder women's participation and leadership in peace and security. We must
ensure that women's voices are not only heard but heeded.

Both the European Union and NATO have implemented the WPS agenda in the past. Both organization's current action plans are ending in 2024 or 2025. There are dark clouds on the horizon for both actors. Far right parties, strongly interlinked with anti-gender movements across Europe, are showing strong poll numbers with regard to the EU elections this June, with current projections showing the ID and ECR groups reaching combined second place in the new European Parliament. For NATO, it is hard to imagine a second Trump presidency would be proactive in advancing the WPS agenda.

Finland has a lot to offer both the European Union and NATO on the topic of Women, Peace, and Security. Our national action plan from last year, by the previous government, was written with broad societal engagement and cooperation, and provides key steps in furthering Finland's long dedication to the WPS agenda. We can and should engage with the new European Commission, and our NATO allies, to promote the agenda both in EU and NATO structures as well as all security and development work undertaken by both organizations with partner countries globally.

The Women, Peace, and Security agenda is more than just a policy framework; it is a call to action. It urges us to recognize the critical role women play in preventing conflict and building peace. It challenges us to reimagine a world where peace is built on the foundations of equality and justice.

As we move forward, let us remember that the work of Women, Peace, and Security is not the responsibility of women alone. It is a collective endeavour that requires the commitment and action of all—regardless of gender. Together, we can forge a path towards a more peaceful, inclusive, and equitable world.

Thank you for your dedication to this cause and for your commitment to creating a better future for all.