



EMBASSY
OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN

BOTSCHAFT
DES FÜRSTENTUMS LIECHTENSTEIN

Statement by H.E. Dominique Hasler
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Education and Sport
of the Principality of Liechtenstein

Women in International Security – WIIS

Women's Rights and Gender Equality Under Threat:
Conflict and Authoritarianism, Closing Civic Space and Covid

Dear Madame President of WIIS, Ms. Ariela Blätter, dear panelists, ladies and gentlemen,

I am grateful to you for inviting me to this event and I congratulate you, Madame President, for assuming your role at the helm of WIIS – one of the top think tanks and promoters for gender equality and women's rights in Washington and far beyond. It is an honor to join forces with you today in advancing the role of women in international security. We are proud of our longstanding close cooperation with WIIS.

I have been Liechtenstein's Foreign Minister since March of this year and this is the first time I am visiting Washington in this function. That we meet today to discuss current threats to women's rights means a lot to me. It speaks to the importance we attach to your mission. And it speaks to the utmost urgency that this topic commands. We are witnessing truly harrowing

developments, recently and over the past one and a half years, and our commitment to change course for the better has never been more important.

First, I would like to address the situation in Afghanistan, for obvious reasons. The events in Afghanistan are truly heartbreaking. When I recall the videos of chaos at Kabul airport a month ago, I am still shocked and with this feeling I am not alone. After a bit of reflection, that shock goes even deeper. Among those desperate people, risking it all trying to save their lives, there were only very few women. The women of Afghanistan who have put so much effort, so much courage and so much dedication into building a more equal society – who have suffered so many setbacks yet stayed patient and persisted – the women of Afghanistan whose lives and livelihoods are now most acutely threatened by the reinstated brutal patriarchy of the Taliban.

Those women of Afghanistan, in many cases, did not even make it to the airport. Their space in society shrank to zero in a matter of days. Many have just used the one option they currently have, locking themselves in for as long as possible and waiting for things to calm down. It is heartbreaking to know them in such a state and it is truly saddening to know that their dreams of yesterday may have become mere utopia for the future – from the mothers who shaped the future with their daughters to the brave members of the Kabul women cycling team, from the restaurant owner to the PhD student.

The international community has a responsibility for these women and there must be accountability for the serious violations of international law that are being committed in Afghanistan right now. The United Nations Security Council must act and uphold its own standards on women, peace and security. And it is important to recall the role the International Criminal Court can play in Afghanistan, to ensure that impunity will not prevail for the atrocities committed there. Justice can be a powerful weapon for women, and Liechtenstein has been a longstanding and committed supporter of the ICC and other international justice mechanisms to that end.

The events in Afghanistan show in the most explicit terms what we are discussing today: that women are on the front line when things turn for the worse – never of their own making. And still, time and again, women stand up for their rights and the rights of all against impossible odds. Think of the women of Belarus fighting for freedom and democracy against brutal violence and oppression. I want to pay a personal tribute to their ongoing bravery and skill. The arbitrary sentencing of Marija Kolesnikowa to 11 years of prison is part of a long list of intimidations by the Belarusian authorities against any expression of dissent. In the face of authoritarianism, arbitrary violence and abuse of power, women’s social space is often severely limited and their risk of experiencing violence further increases as a result.

Even in democratic societies, with strong legal safeguards and high gender equality standards, the correlation between violence and a lack of protective social space prevails. If there was ever a doubt, the pandemic has proven as much. Taking girls out of school and confining women to the privacy of the home has greatly increased their risk of being exposed to domestic violence and other forms of abuse. The lack of protection that open social interaction provides has led to something people have called the “shadow pandemic” – pervasive domestic violence largely going unnoticed by society. We have to learn the lessons from the complex gender dimensions of this pandemic and this aspect in particular. I am personally committed to this, and it is indeed my professional duty, because I am not only Liechtenstein’s Foreign Minister, but also its Minister of Education. I know how important it is to keep the schools open and running. In Liechtenstein the Government has therefore made this a priority throughout the pandemic. We have to ask ourselves: How can we better preserve safe spaces for women and girls in times of crises? I believe this must be a priority area as we engage in discussions about lessons learnt and future emergency planning, be it for public health emergencies or other calamities.

But we must also continue to sharpen our tools to fight crimes predominantly affecting women and girls in crisis situations. The number of child abuse cases, early and forced marriages and child trafficking has increased during the pandemic. This is a cause of great concern and a call for action on all of us. Liechtenstein has made the fight against modern slavery and human trafficking

its priority contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Together with our partners from the finance industry and along with other countries, we have developed the FAST initiative. FAST stands for Finance against Slavery and Trafficking and is an initiative that aims at identifying and stopping criminal financial flows associated with these crimes. We can no longer accept that the gravest crimes and human rights violations continue to go unpunished and continue to be so lucrative. With the FAST initiative we hope to make a contribution to holding those who are responsible to account and to raise the price for these heinous crimes. At the same time, this is a task for society as a whole and I look forward to the panel for a broader discussion on societal duties and functions in the prevention of violence against women and girls.

Thank you very much for letting me share my reflections. I will leave it at that for the time being and hand the floor back to you.