

OPENING SPEECH OF PRIME MINISTER INGRIDA ŠIMONYTĖ AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE "WOMEN IN LAW ENFORCEMENT"

Dear Commissioner Johansson, dear ministers,

Dear participants of the Conference,

First of all, let me thank the organizers of this excellent idea. My hope – that this event will provide an encouragement and inspiration on important road towards enriching the field of law enforcement with the skills and talents of women.

Today, I also stand before you to acknowledge and celebrate the invaluable contributions of women in law enforcement in Lithuania and beyond. These dedicated individuals exemplify resilience, commitment, and excellence in maintaining the safety and order of our societies.

In a field that is traditionally dominated by men, our female officers have shattered stereotypes and proven their ability to handle the complexities of law enforcement. Their diverse perspectives strengthen our institutions by fostering a more inclusive and effective approach to policing.

It is very important to acknowledge and celebrate the stories of individuals breaking barriers, whether in gender-stereotypes or in other fields.

Unfortunately, there is still much to be done before we fully eliminate gender-based stereotypes. Some of the criticism towards women in high-level positions of responsibility is rooted in the stereotype that men are inherently better, stronger, and more rational leaders. Often, a woman aspiring to an important position has to outperform her male competitors by a significant margin.

There is still a gender imbalance in various sectors of law enforcement agencies, with far fewer women, especially at the highest levels of management. This issue is not just a matter of fairness.

Various studies show that increased participation of female officers contributes to greater quality of services and operational effectiveness, enhances community trust, and reduces corruption within security institutions.

Based on this evidence, it is crucial to commit to promoting a more inclusive and gender-balanced environment in law enforcement. It is essential to provide equal opportunities for professional development, ensuring that women in law enforcement have the tools and support needed to thrive in their careers.

It is important to appeal to male colleagues and encourage them to contribute to the promotion of gender equality by encouraging women, appointing them to key positions, and by stepping in when they see discriminatory or harassing practices. Emphasising that gender equality is everybody's business is vital, as it benefits not only women but everyone.

For many years, we have looked up to Scandinavian countries for the gender-balanced policies. However, today, Ukrainian women fighting at the front as soldiers, snipers, paramedics, etc., serve as the most inspiring example of the equal abilities and skills that both genders possess. On the greatest missions, such as defence of the Homeland against raw aggression, nobody asks (frankly, nobody cares) about the gender, because it is a duty and an honour for all citizens to stand up and defend what is most dear to us.

Today, I invite you to use the framework of this conference to explore ways of empowering women in law enforcement and developing professional environments where their talents and aspirations are valued and

embraced. I am confident that we are all here not just to talk about change but also to be the change-makers.

As we honour the women who serve and protect our communities, let us pledge to cultivate an environment that respects their achievements, promotes gender equality, and empowers future generations of women in law enforcement, and in other fields.

I hope that today's event will encourage women, inspire policies, and lead to initiatives that will help achieve a better gender balance at all levels of administrative hierarchy. This effort will help create a world where skills and abilities, not gender, are what truly matter.

Thank you.