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**Intervenção da Ministra da Defesa Nacional, Helena Carreiras, no
Seminário Internacional “The War in Ukraine from a Gender Perspective”**

Instituto da Defesa Nacional, Lisboa, 26 de abril de 2023

More than one year after Russia's brutal war against Ukraine, we stand unwaveringly in support of the Ukrainian people and government and reaffirm our solidarity with the defence of their territory and population, and of our shared democratic values.

During this period, we have been inspired by the resilience of the Ukrainians, their leadership and particularly the bravery of their Armed Forces in this fight for freedom, that is also our freedom.

Ukrainians are the key pillar of national resistance, which means that they are also the ones most affected. Men, women, children, and the elderly are being differently impacted for many reasons. Taking these differences into account is important to understand the dynamics of conflict, assess reconstruction efforts and ensure that our position is grounded by a strong commitment to justice

and equality. Tant is why including a gender perspective in our reflections might prove particularly useful.

This seminar is a contribution from Portugal to this important discussion, that I hope will inspire further action. I want therefore to thank the Equality Office the Portuguese Ministry of National Defence for organizing this timely initiative and the National Defence institute for hosting it. Likewise, I want to thank all the speakers and moderators in today's event for sharing their views with this vast audience, both here in Lisbon, in Kyiv, and virtually.

The landscape of war and peace is not gender neutral, as the landmark UN Security Council resolution 1325 recognised. Studies have shown a positive correlation between country rankings of global peace and gender equality. Further commitments from the

international community to gender equality and to sustainable peace must therefore be inevitably linked.

Indeed, strengthening gender equality and women's rights is both a human rights obligation and key for cultivating peace. As the 2015 Global Study on the Implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 1325 demonstrated, the participation of women at all levels is key to the operational effectiveness, success and sustainability of peace processes and peacebuilding efforts.

We know that women have been central to efforts to countering Russian aggression, since 2014, when Moscow illegally annexed Crimea and decided to back up separatists in the Donbass region. That has been very well documented by multiple international organizations and media outlets.

When the conflict in eastern Ukraine began, women joined the frontlines as volunteers, journalists, medical staff, and military personnel in the army and in volunteer battalions. As civil society organisations worked to support internal displaced people (IDPs), women activists and NGOs played a key role in providing humanitarian assistance.

After more than one year since Russia's invasion, it is worth inquiring what additional lessons have been identified from a gender perspective.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since 24 February 2022, one-third of Ukrainians have been forced out of their homes. This is the largest human displacement crisis

in the world today. Out of the 15 million forcibly displaced people, 90% are women and children.

We see that also in Portugal, where among the almost 60.000 refugees welcomed so far, more than 34.000 are women. Nearly 14.000 temporary protection requests have also been granted to minors, accounting for 25% of the total number of Ukrainians in the country.

There is also mounting evidence that conflict-related sexual violence is being used as a tactic of war. According to a survey conducted last April, 93 percent of Ukrainians know of such crimes committed by Russian forces, and 20 percent personally know someone who has been subjected to sexual violence committed by Russian troops. The international community is bound to

investigate such crimes, and Portugal strongly supports these efforts.

We have seen pictures of women and children fleeing as refugees. But there is less talk about the impact on them leaving their husbands, fathers, children. Ukrainian men face increased vulnerability as they lack access to both financial resources and social networks. With women and children being prioritised in shelters, men's access is more limited.

We see women voluntarily joining the army to save their own country and to protect their children; though for some, choosing whether to leave their kids behind to fight and defend their country is the real dilemma.

In this dire scenario, Russia has been found to systematically use disinformation as a strategic tool to undermine social cohesion in European countries, using the war against Ukraine as a pretext. Sexuality and gender-based narratives have featured highly in Russia's campaigns.

We have seen examples of disinformation that build upon these preconceived ideas. In such stories, the implication is that if you are a member of NATO and have soldiers stationed on the ground, close to the eastern flank, they bring violence and moral degradation.

Ladies and gentlemen

Differences in gender roles and stereotypes impact everything we do. That is why 23 years ago, the UN Security Council established

the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. This global push broadly attempts to address the inequitable experiences of women in conflict and supports and promotes their role in peace processes, including negotiations.

The discrepancies between how Russia and western democracies have engaged with the broader Women, Peace and Security agenda, also highlight a real difference in the way we interact with our allies and partners. Gender is clearly one of the many possible frameworks for addressing the multiple impacts of this war, and we can support Ukraine in this context.

Portugal is bound by these commitments and we stand ready to do even more, bilaterally and together with our Allies and Partners in the European Union, in NATO and other multilateral fora.

That is why, following the many conversations I have held in the last months with Minister Reznikov, namely on February 24th, in Kyiv, and based on the lessons identified by the Ukrainian Armed Forces, we began studying the possibility of developing military uniforms and clothing for women who are fighting in the frontline and require suitable equipment.

This comes on the heels of the donation of five armoured ambulances that I announced last week in Ramstein, in the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, and which elevates our combined military assistance to a total of more than 950 tonnes of material, in addition to the humanitarian support already provided thus far.

Today, more than ever, we are faced with the challenge to meet words with actions, and to place women at the heart of our efforts to reach peace and security in Europe and elsewhere.

As a Ukrainian female veteran said over women`s motivation to join the fights: “Women have the same reasons as men for joining
- We want to keep Ukraine free.”

Thank you very much and I wish you all fruitful discussions.