

## ***Opening remarks***

### **by NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, at the Annual Conference of the Committee on Women in the NATO Forces in NATO HQ**

Madame Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,



Thank you for those kind words of introduction. It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all to NATO Headquarters and to this year's Conference of the Committee on Women in the NATO Forces. Your committee does invaluable work, and as the number of women in uniform increases throughout the Alliance forces, your role becomes even more important. But of course it is not just you, on this committee, who deserve my thanks. So let me say here, publicly, just how much I value the contribution made by women in uniform across so many aspects of NATO's work, and in particular on our operations. They, like their male counterparts, are doing a fantastic job under extremely challenging and demanding conditions.

Obviously, operations are very much the visible face of NATO, but the Alliance is also a unique forum for political discussions and consultations on a broad range of security issues. We do this not only among the 26 Allies but also with many other countries and institutions. And I am particularly pleased to see here this morning representatives from some of our partner countries in Europe as well as the Mediterranean region.



You will be aware, or at least I hope you are aware, that NATO is in a process of transformation. A process designed to enable NATO to have the right policies, capabilities and structures to meet the security challenges of today and tomorrow. These policies, you may be surprised to hear, also include a specific policy on gender balance and diversity. I think it is essential that NATO is seen as an organisation that is open, transparent and modern. And that people see, and understand, that recognizing and promoting gender balance throughout the Alliance is important for NATO. It is essential that we benefit from the energy and talents of our entire population, not just one half. And in this respect, you represent an "enabler" - you are a key element in moving the process forward. And I am fully committed to helping you - which is one of the reasons why I was so pleased to be asked to address you this morning.

What I should like to do in these brief remarks is give you a feel for the main strands of work in NATO at the moment, and then give you my view of the vital part you play in that effort.

To do this, I should like to look at the decisions taken by Allied Heads of State and Government at their summit meeting in Bucharest a few weeks ago. Because those decisions laid out very clearly the Alliance's position and plans on all the major issues facing the Alliance. The decisions can be grouped into four general areas.

First. Further enlargement. NATO enlargement has been a great success, both for NATO and for Euro-Atlantic security and stability. That policy will continue. As a result of the Bucharest Summit, Albania and Croatia have already begun their accession talks, with the aim of joining NATO next year. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<sup>1</sup> will also be invited, once the issue of its name has been resolved. And Heads of State and Government agreed that Georgia and Ukraine will one day become members of NATO, so we have started a period of intensive engagement with these two countries. In addition, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been invited to begin an Intensified Dialogue with NATO on the full range of issues relating to their possible future membership. Taken together, these decisions will ensure that the Alliance can continue to play its role in helping to build a stable and secure Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

Next – operations. I am aware that many of you here have first-hand experience of NATO operations, including in Afghanistan. And bringing security and stability to Afghanistan will be a most prominent feature of the Alliance's work for the foreseeable future. Indeed, this task is NATO's Number One priority. At Bucharest, the Alliance agreed a political-military plan that sets out a clear way forward for the NATO-led operation in Afghanistan. It stresses our long-term commitment to the operation, as well as our determination to continue to empower the Afghans to take care of their own security. The summit discussion on Afghanistan was unique, in that Allied Heads of State met with their counterparts from all our partner countries supporting the operation, as well as with the United Nations Secretary-General, President Karzai, and senior representatives from the European Union and the World Bank. This served to highlight the importance of the whole of the international community acting together, in a fully coordinated manner, as it is very clear that security and development in Afghanistan must go hand-in-hand.

Of course, another major operation led by NATO is in Kosovo. And again, many of you have probably served there. We are at a challenging time in Kosovo and NATO has made it clear that it intends to stay there, under the authority of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, to impartially provide security and stability to all the people of Kosovo. Again, this is a task that not is not going to disappear overnight, and which involves considerable coordination with other international organisations, especially the United Nations and the European Union. But I have to admit that at NATO, we are concerned about uncertainties on future arrangements between these two organisations, in particular about the possible lack of adequate international police. From NATO's perspective, it is vital that a fully capable UNMIK police presence remains throughout Kosovo until replaced by any other international police – which itself must be equally capable. We must avoid a security gap

between these two international police operations. NATO is not a police force and should not be asked to take on such tasks.

The third area I wish to highlight is deepening partnerships. Our partners are crucial to the way in which NATO operates today, and we are committed to further tailoring our dialogue and cooperation to their specific interests and concerns. We have formal partnerships with countries across Europe, in the Caucasus, Central Asia, North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf Region. Taken together, there are 35 nations that have established partnership links with NATO, and one of these countries is Russia. Mr Putin attended the Bucharest Summit and although he certainly did not stay silent on issues on which Russia and NATO disagree, such as Kosovo, CFE and missile defence, he did agree with the vital importance of the broader NATO-Russia relationship and of maintaining an open and candid dialogue. In addition to these formal relationships, it is clear that in today's age of global challenges, NATO also needs to develop relationships with other nations across the globe. We have already established very good relations with countries such as Australia, Japan and New Zealand – and I am convinced that we shall be establishing similar relationships with many more countries over the years to come.

Finally, we must be constantly alive to the need to prepare to meet new security challenges. The age of globalisation confronts us with new, non-traditional challenges, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, cyber attacks, or a disruption of our energy supply, and our Bucharest Summit showed that there is a role for NATO in responding to those challenges.

But what do all these strands of work mean for you, for the Women in NATO Forces?

In terms of enlargement and deepening partnerships, the implications are clear: you can expect to see your opposite numbers from many of these countries coming to you for advice and sharing lessons learned. But in some of our partner countries, unfortunately, gender balance, particularly in the armed forces, is an alien notion. So I see you having an increasing role in education and broader defence reform issues. You can also expect to see women from partner countries' armed forces increasingly alongside you on operations – so what are the implications there?

NATO-led operations are complex and many other international actors are involved – host nation governments, other international organisations, and NGOs for example. And increasingly, these NGOs include organisations focussed on issues relating to cultural awareness and gender issues.

Given these factors, I believe it was entirely appropriate for the United Nations to adopt Security Council Resolution 1325, "Women, Peace and Security." While recognising the distinct impact that war and conflict can have on men, women, and children, this resolution specifically highlights that women and gender issues can play a vital role as an enabler in peace building and nation stabilisation. The Resolution calls for full and equal female participation at all levels - from early conflict prevention to post-conflict reconstruction – and it recognises women as advocates for peace. And that is exactly how I view our NATO forces – including the women within them – as advocates for peace. Your conference this week provides you with

the perfect opportunity to address how to improve the gender balance in the armed forces, particularly during operations.

The fourth area of work I highlighted was new challenges. And although I mentioned missile defence, energy security and cyber defence, there is perhaps another challenge that we should consider: how will Western armed forces manage to recruit in face of the demographic decline? One solution to this problem would be to recruit more women. So I am delighted that during this conference you will be discussing whether there are limitations on the role of women in the armed forces, and whether there are objective 'gender free' or 'gender fair' physical and psychological criteria. In fact, I regret that I cannot join you in those particular debates, because I believe they could be particularly stimulating.

Madam Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by repeating my thanks for all that you do. And let me also reiterate my commitment to continuing to transform this Alliance. To make it an organisation that is truly representative of the societies that it serves. And to enable it to attract the best and the brightest – regardless of their gender - to help move it forward. I know that this is your cause as well. I wish you the very best in your work this week. Thank you.