

**Elements for an intervention at the Conference “ Eradicating domestic violence” organised by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
Brussels, 21 September 2012”**

Facts:

- Violence against women is a human rights violation; a threat to women and our societies as a whole; it is a crime and unacceptable!
- At least one out of every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Usually, the abuser is a member of her own family or someone known to her. Domestic violence is the largest form of abuse of women worldwide, irrespective of region, culture, ethnicity, education, class and religion. (UN Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women (2006) (A/61/122/Add.1) - these are, the hard facts! And we can not turn our head away and ignore them! There is no excuse for abuse; there is no excuse for ignoring and tolerating any form of violence against women!

The Istanbul Convention

- The Istanbul Convention marks an important step forward to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and put an end to impunity;
- It is the first legally binding instrument in Europe on violence against women and domestic violence and in terms of scope, it is the most far-reaching international treaty in this field.
- The Convention creates an extremely comprehensive legal framework to prevent violence against women and domestic violence, protect victims and punish the perpetrators.

- It also introduces a whole new approach to violence prevention and victim protection by requiring all relevant actors to co-operate and coordinate in order to weave a net of safety around the victim: criminal justice, the police, social and health services, child protection agencies, shelters etc.
- It also seeks to change the hearts and minds of individuals by calling on all members of society, in particular men and boys, to change attitudes.
- In essence, it is a renewed call for greater equality between women and men, because violence against women is deeply rooted in the inequality between women and men in society and is perpetuated by a culture of tolerance and denial.
- Thank the Committee for its support for the Istanbul Convention and its call to EU member states to sign, ratify and implement the Convention!
- The Istanbul Convention is open for signature by the European Union (Article 75). Express hope EU will sign and ratify.
- Furthermore, it is a treaty made in Europe but not meant for Europe only. It is open to accession by non European States and is already inspiring the legislations and policies of countries across the globe!

Added value of the Convention (in a nutshell):

1. By accepting the convention, governments are obliged to change their laws, introduce practical measures and allocate resources to create a zero tolerance zone for violence against women and domestic violence.
2. Preventing and combating such violence is no longer a matter of goodwill but a legally binding obligation.
3. For the first time in history, the convention makes it clear that violence against women and domestic violence can no longer be considered as a private matter but that states have an obligation to prevent violence, protect victims and punish the perpetrators.

This will help victims all over Europe and beyond.

In more detail:

1. Governments that ratify the treaty will have to criminalise and prosecute acts of violence that all too often go unpunished: rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment, forced abortion and forced sterilisation.
2. Excuses on the grounds of culture, custom, religion or so-called "honour" will no longer be acceptable. Introducing specific criminal offences makes it clear that suffering any of these is not a private problem but a matter for the police.
3. The State has the obligation to provide services for victims of violence. These include shelters, around-the-clock helplines, as well as medical and legal counselling. And these services need to be available to all women, in the country-side and in big cities, and with no strings attached.
4. Governments have to invest in extensive training for the police, the prosecution services and the judiciary to make sure they treat women victims with respect for their dignity and to avoid secondary victimisation.
5. Greater equality between women and men. The Convention tackles the root causes of violence against women and domestic violence and contains a range of general obligations to promote equality in law and in fact.
6. Better protection of children's rights – Violence against women and domestic violence have a direct and indirect impact on children. The Convention contains a range of provisions about prevention, protection, provision of services and prosecution to ensure the rights of children that are victims of, or have witnessed violence are promoted and protected.
7. The Convention will make our societies a safer and better place for migrant women, women asylum-seekers and women refugees. The convention prohibits discrimination on the grounds of migrant or refugee status when it comes to implementing its provisions.
8. Last but not least, better recognition of the role of, and more support for non-governmental organisations and the civil society. Parties to the convention have the obligation to allocate appropriate financial and human resources for activities carried out by non-governmental organisations and the civil society.

Concluding

- The success of the convention will largely depend on the political will and support of governments. It is their responsibility, and the responsibility of our societies as a whole to prevent violence, to protect victims and to prosecute the perpetrators;
- The convention provides the necessary tools for governments and our societies to assume these responsibilities;
- To date, it has been signed by 21 member states of the Council of Europe;
- And ratified by one - Turkey;
- 10 ratifications are needed for the Convention to enter into force and the monitoring mechanism to be set up to make sure state parties respect the obligations and provisions of the Convention;
- It is time to move from words to action and speedily sign, ratify and implement the Convention
- It is not enough for Governments to say combating violence against women is a priority;
- Governments that sign and ratify the Convention send a strong message that there is assured political will to protect human rights;
- In times of financial crisis and uncertainty, this message is lost on many decision-makers and public spending is often reduced to a bare minimum – with disastrous consequences! Hard political decisions need to be made! Express hope that the political leaders and decision-makers of Europe recognise the value in using the Istanbul Convention to reduce violence against women and better protect its victims.
- The Istanbul Convention can make a real difference. But to be able to do so, it must enter into force, and that requires your commitment and support!