Parliamentary Network

“Women Free from Violence”

One in four women in Europe has experienced physical violence at least once during her adult life. Violence often happens behind closed doors. The majority of cases are not reported. Victims are not assisted and perpetrators are not punished. Freedom from violence should be the first human right.

51 parliamentarians have made a commitment to make it become not only a right but also a reality.

The Convention will enter into force once 10 countries have ratified it. 8 out of the 10 ratifications have to come from Council of Europe member States.

What can you do to support the Network?

Are you an NGO, a media organisation, a public body, a member of parliament, an official or a professional? The Network stands ready to support your activities aimed at making freedom from violence a reality for women in Europe and beyond. Let us know what you are doing and how we could help.

The Network also needs your support: you can help us increase our outreach capacity to promote a zero tolerance zone for violence against women and domestic violence, and the main tool set up by the Council of Europe to this end, the Istanbul Convention.

You could:

• sign and widely circulate the petition in support of the Istanbul Convention;
• keep us informed about developments in your country;
• invite Network members to participate in events, debates and awareness-raising activities;
• share with the Network examples of good practice;
• publicise our work and the Istanbul Convention.

Reference

Resolution 1861 (2012) on Promoting Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

The Parliamentary Assembly is one of two statutory organs of the Council of Europe. It was the first European parliamentary body after 1945 and today is Europe’s biggest political forum. With its 318 Representatives (and the same number of Substitutes) from national parliaments, the Assembly represents the main political currents of the member States of “greater Europe”.

Network Website/Newsletter/E-mail
assembly.coe.int/stopviolence/
womenfreefromviolence@coe.int

Secretariat contacts
Ms Géraldine Grenet
geraldine.grenet@coe.int
Tel. +33 3 90 21 49 82 – Fax: +33 3 90 21 56 52

Ms Elodie Fischer
elodie.fischer@coe.int
Tel. + 33 3 90 21 56 34 – Fax: +33 3 90 21 56 52

www.assembly.coe.int/stopviolence/
The Network
The Parliamentary Network “Women Free from Violence” is composed of 51 parliamentarians, belonging to delegations of member and observer States with the Parliamentary Assembly, as well as delegations of partners for democracy. It has been active since 2006, when it contributed to the Council of Europe campaign Stop domestic violence against women. The Network has played an unfatigable role in trying to raise legal and policy standards in the area of the prevention of violence against women, the protection of its victims and the effective prosecution of the perpetrators. Since 2011, it has set, as its main objective, the promotion of the Istanbul Convention.

Mr Mendes Bota, General Rapporteur on violence against women
Mr Mendes Bota (Portugal, EPP/CD) was appointed General Rapporteur on violence against women by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination in early 2012. His role is to contribute to raising awareness on the phenomenon of violence against women amongst the general public and institutions, be they governmental or non-governmental, and to promote the Istanbul Convention. Mr Mendes Bota also ensures the political co-ordination of the Network.

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention, CETS No. 210)

Violence against women: facts
- violence against women is often considered a private issue and many women are reluctant to report it or are discouraged from doing so by their family or community;
- many cases do not reach court or, when they do, perpetrators receive minimal punishment;
- the financial cost of violence against women is high, an estimated 34 billion euros per country across Council of Europe member States annually.

How does the Istanbul Convention address these facts?
- it aims at promoting a change of mentality in society, recognising violence against women as both a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination;
- it reduce legal loopholes, also providing for the criminalisation of specific offences such as stalking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilisation;
- it places victims at its centre and puts an emphasis on prevention of violence against women.

What do states have to do once they ratify the Convention?
When ratifying the Convention, governments are obliged to change their laws, introduce policies and allocate resources to create a zero tolerance zone for violence against women and domestic violence. Their obligations include:

Prevention
- training professionals working with victims, raising awareness;
- co-operating with NGOs, the media and the private sector to reach out to the public.

Protection
- setting up specialised support services that provide medical assistance as well as psychological and legal counselling to victims and their children;
- setting up shelters in sufficient numbers and introducing free of charge, round-the-clock telephone helplines.

Prosecution
- ensuring that all forms of violence against women and domestic violence are criminalised and appropriately punished;
- ensuring that victims have access to special protection measures during investigation and judicial proceedings;
- ensuring that law enforcement agencies respond immediately to calls for assistance and manage dangerous situations adequately.

Comprehensive policies
- adopting comprehensive and co-ordinated policies that place the rights of victims at the centre of all measures;
- involving all relevant actors (government agencies, national, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations and many more).