

parliamentarians and discuss legislative reforms needed to adapt national legislation to the Convention and speed up the ratification process.

Film festivals

Mr Mendes Bota contacted directors of human rights film festivals throughout Europe to inform them about the activities of the Network and possibly initiate fruitful collaboration. “As parliamentarians and Network members, we should try, wherever possible, to take an active part in these festivals” he said. “We should encourage organisers of such events to put on their programme movies dealing with violence against women and domestic violence and combine the screenings with conferences and debates on specific topics. I am convinced that such public actions will strongly participate in creating a collective consciousness about the fact that violence against women is and will always remain unacceptable.”

→ Upcoming events

Network meeting – A strategy to campaign for the Istanbul Convention, Strasbourg, 4 October 2012

During its next meeting, the Network will hold an exchange of views with the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms Battaini-Draroni and discuss concrete actions to be undertaken by its members at national level (parliamentary seminars, translation of the Handbook, film festivals, social media, media campaign, funding, and others).

Peace One's Day Global Truce 2012 Campaign

The 2012 Global Truce Campaign aims at the largest global reduction of violence, including domestic violence, through the organisation of peaceful gatherings and actions to mark Peace Day on 21 September 2012. “Domestic violence occurs across the globe, affecting millions of people across society, irrespective of economic status. No country or community is untouched” declared the Rt. Hon. Baroness Scotland, founder of the Global Foundation for the Elimination of Domestic Violence. More information on the campaign can be found at www.peaceoneday.org

Regional conference in Helsinki

The Council of Europe Directorate General of Human Rights and the Rule of Law, in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, is organising a Regional Conference on the Istanbul Convention – “From signature to ratification and implementation - Exchange of experiences and practices”. This Conference will take place in Helsinki, on 17 and 18 January 2013. The main objectives are to encourage member states to sign and ratify the Convention, discuss the benefits and challenges of ratifying the Convention and

exchange experiences, know-how and networking. Participation will include representatives from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Russia.

→ Call for funds

In my capacity as Political Coordinator of the Network and General Rapporteur on violence against women, I wish to thank the parliaments which have contributed to the funding of the activities of the Parliamentary Network “Women Free from Violence” so far. This is a tangible sign of their determination to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. Therefore, I warmly thank the parliaments of Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland, and the governments of Andorra, Finland and Luxembourg.

These voluntary contributions have enabled us to produce a Handbook for parliamentarians on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), together with visibility material (poster, leaflet, newsletter); organise a series of exchanges of views on themes such as stalking, honour crimes, police response to victims of violence and marital rape; and actively promote the signature and ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

The Network needs your support to speed up the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention. If you wish to support us with a voluntary contribution, please contact Ms Géraldine Grenet (geraldine.grenet@coe.int, tel. +33 3 90 21 49 82), project manager or Ms Elodie Fischer (elodie.fischer@coe.int, tel. + 33 3 90 21 56 34), Co-Secretary of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

Mendes Bota

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Parliamentary Network
“Women Free from Violence”

NEWSLETTER 2 – October 2012



Editorial

One out of four women in the world is a victim of physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. Women aged between 15 and 44 years are more likely to be victims of rape and domestic violence than of cancer, road accidents and war combined. Behind these frightening facts hide women who are scared to go home each evening and who fear for their own lives and those of their children. These women eventually lose all confidence in themselves and their abilities.

For all those women suffering, the *Convention of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* is not only a legal instrument but an ally in their daily struggle against an intolerable reality. It is a fundamental tool that actively participates in the empowerment of women, which gives them a rightful place in our society, not as victims of mentalities and attitudes of another age but as active agents of their own lives with their rights respected.

Much progress has been made in raising awareness of this scourge but there still remains a lot to do. On the long path to full recognition of women’s rights, we find 49 parliamentarians in the Parliamentary Network “Women Free from Violence”. These 49 men and women commit themselves on a daily basis and with conviction in their parliaments, working in the field with NGOs to raise awareness on what represents a major violation of human rights. By their action, they can make a difference.

I welcome the recent publication of the Handbook for Parliamentarians, an essential tool for gaining a better understanding of the Convention, and thus to better defend it. It will prove to be a useful guide for future promotional activities. Finally, I congratulate the General Rapporteur on violence against women and all Network members for their active participation and enthusiasm, and hope that the Handbook will support them in their fight to make freedom from violence a reality.

Jean-Claude Mignon
President of the Parliamentary Assembly
of the Council of Europe



www.assembly.coe.int/stopviolence/

→ NEWS

Conference on “Legislators to make freedom from violence a reality”



“Parliamentarians have a vital role to play in transforming mentalities and making freedom from violence a reality in their communities” said Ms Jozefina Topalli, Speaker of the Albanian Parliament, opening the conference on “*Legislators to make freedom from violence a reality*” organised by the Network in Tirana (Albania) on 14 September 2012.

During the event, a *Handbook for parliamentarians on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, meant as a tool for the promotion of the Convention and other international standards in combating violence against women, was officially launched. The speakers, namely the Rt. Hon. Baroness Scotland, Ms Feride Acar and Ms Hilary Fisher, made concrete proposals on how to enhance the role of parliamentarians and parliamentary networks to eradicate violence against women, stressing the need to pool ideas, efforts and resources in order to devise and implement a precise strategy.

“This conference has very good news to report. Belgium has just signed the Istanbul Convention and Albania is very likely to ratify it in the coming months, as promised by Ms Topalli during the conference. I am very confident the Convention will soon enter into force” declared Mr Mendes Bota, General Rapporteur on violence against women and Political Coordinator of the Network.

The Handbook, together with the Conclusions of the Conference, can be found on the Network’s website. Hard copies will also be made available on demand for any activity related to the promotion of the Convention, to members of the Network and interested organisations or bodies.

Belgium, Italy and Monaco sign the Istanbul Convention



“Due to the partisan gridlock, Belgium has been compelled to postpone the signature of the Convention. Today, I am delighted with this news and in the Belgian Senate we will certainly renew our efforts to achieve ratification very soon” said Ms Fatiha Saïdi (SOC), Belgian senator and active member of the Network. Belgium signed the Istanbul Convention on Tuesday 11 September 2012. It was followed by Monaco and Italy, thus increasing the

number of signatory member states to 24. Turkey still remains the only country which has ratified the Convention. 10 ratifications are needed in order to allow the entry into force of the Convention (8 of these 10 ratifications have to be made by Council of Europe member states).

Promoting the Istanbul Convention among OSCE participating states

The Istanbul Convention has the potential of becoming a global standard in addressing violence against women and domestic violence. It is not only open to signature and ratification by all member and observer states and the European Union, but non-member states can accede to it any time after its entry into force. Some countries in the Council of Europe neighbourhood, in particular Central Asian countries, have indicated their desire to find out more about the Convention and are actively resorting to it when introducing new laws and policies. In response to this stated interest, the Council of Europe organised, together with OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE Gender Section and UN Women, a side event on international standards in preventing and combating violence against women during the OSCE Human Dimension meeting in Warsaw on 28 September 2012. The event entitled “Breaking the Silence: Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence by Implementing International Standards”, helped raise mutual awareness among OSCE participating states and Council of Europe member states about existing obligations to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, and highlighted the added value of the Istanbul Convention and its complementarity with other international standards.

→ Network members’ activities at national level

Activities of the General Rapporteur on violence against women in Albania, Georgia and Morocco



Mr Mendes Bota (Portugal, EPP/CD), General Rapporteur on violence against women, conducted visits to Albania (14-15 September 2012), Georgia (2-3 July 2012) and Morocco (8-9 July 2012), where he met with government representatives, parliamentarians and local NGOs. The main objective of these visits was to promote the Istanbul Convention in order to speed up its entry into force.

The General Rapporteur also participated in a Regional conference on preventing and combating violence against women on 24 and 25 September 2012 in Rabat. The aim of this conference was to exchange experiences and practices in the area of governance and monitoring of violence against women, develop tools to effectively combat such violence, and strengthen Euro-Mediterranean partnerships in this field.

The Ukrainian way to ratification of the Istanbul Convention



Ms Olena Bondarenko (EPP/CD), Chair of the Subcommittee on international legal issues and gender policy of the Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Human Rights, National Minorities and International Relations, initiated a special roundtable entitled “Preventing violence: harmonisation of Ukrainian legislation with the Council of Europe standards” which took place on 7 June 2012 in Ukraine. The main purpose of the roundtable was to discuss effective ways to prompt legislative and executive powers to ratify the Convention as soon as possible. The event was jointly organised by her Committee, a Parliamentary Development Programme in Ukraine and NGOs such as the International Women’s Rights Center ‘La Strada-Ukraine’ and the Women’s Information Center.

Human rights film festival in Turkey



Ms Nursuna Memecan (Turkey, ALDE) presented the Istanbul Convention and the Network during a human rights film festival in Turkey (the “*Forum on prevention of violence and discrimination against women*” organised by the Istanbul University Law Faculty, Istanbul, 26 September 2012). “Human rights film festivals are a great opportunity to reach out to the general public. They can also help victims realise that what they experience is not a fact of life but a serious human rights violation” said Ms Memecan.

→ National initiatives to come

Translating the Handbook

Following the launch of the Handbook for parliamentarians on the Istanbul Convention in Tirana, Network members from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Portugal and Turkey stated their interest to have the Handbook translated into their national languages. UN Women Albania has undertaken to support the translation and publication of the Handbook in Albanian. “Such initiatives will greatly participate to publicise the Convention among other parliamentarians in the Council of Europe member states. The Istanbul Convention opened for signature on 11 May 2011 and this Handbook is a good opportunity to create a new dynamic with the ambition to promote further ratifications” stated Mr Mendes Bota.

Parliamentary seminars to mark 25 November

Parliamentary seminars on the Istanbul Convention will be organised by Network members in their national parliaments around the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November 2012, to enhance knowledge of the Convention among