

→ Events

58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, New York, 10-21 March 2014

The 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women opened in New York on 10 March. This year's focus was on the challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls. Mr Mendes Bota, General Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Political Co-ordinator of the Network, presented the work of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Network at several events on 10 and 11 March.

For more information: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw58-2014>.

Thematic debate on violence against women, Strasbourg, 19 March 2014



On 19 March, the Committee of Ministers held a thematic debate on violence against women with the participation of Mr Mendes Bota, General Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Political Co-ordinator of the Network, Ms Päivi Hirvelä, Judge of the European Court of Human Rights in respect of Finland and Ms Rosa Logar, representing Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE). The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, underlined that the Istanbul Convention is already recognised at international level as a gold standard and insisted on the need to change mindsets and fight gender stereotyping.

→ Reports under preparation at the PACE

Prostitution, trafficking and modern slavery

The report on prostitution, trafficking and modern slavery prepared by Mr Mendes Bota highlights the links between trafficking in human beings and prostitution, while recognising they are distinct phenomena. The report reveals that an estimated 84% of trafficking victims in Europe are forced into prostitution. Similarly, it shows that victims of trafficking represent a large proportion of sex workers. Different legal approaches and cultural sensitivities make it difficult to propose a single model for prostitution regulations that would fit all Council of Europe member States, however human rights should be the main yardstick used when designing and implementing policies on prostitution and trafficking. To this end, the criminalisation of the purchase of sex services, based on the Swedish model, is considered by Mr Mendes Bota as the most effective tool for preventing and combating trafficking in human beings.

Mr Mendes Bota's report will be presented on 8 April during the plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg.

→ Call for funds

I wish to thank the parliaments that have contributed to the funding of the activities of the Parliamentary Network "Women Free from Violence". This is a tangible sign of their determination to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.

These voluntary contributions have enabled us to produce a handbook for parliamentarians on the Istanbul Convention, available in 15 different languages, together with visibility material (posters, leaflets, newsletters), and to organise a series of hearings, seminars and conferences to promote the Istanbul Convention.

The Network needs your support to speed up the entry into force of the convention and to ensure that it is effectively implemented. If you wish to support us with a voluntary contribution, please contact us.

I thank you in advance for your co-operation and support.

Mr Mendes Bota

Political Co-ordinator of the Network,
General Rapporteur on Violence against Women



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Parliamentary Network "Women Free from Violence"

NEWSLETTER – APRIL 2014



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WOUNDED TO DEATH

THEATRICAL PROJECT BY SERENA DANDINI
COLLABORATION TO TEXTS BY MAURA MISITI

9TH OF APRIL 2014 2:00 PM
COUNCIL OF EUROPE, PALAIS DE L'EUROPE, SALLE 5
STRASBOURG

INFO & RESERVATIONS: WOMENFREEFROMVIOLENCE@COE.INT



→ Council of Europe – New publication

On 19 March, the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) published its “Analytical study of the results of the 4th round of monitoring the implementation of Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence in Council of Europe member States”.

The study shows a steady increase in the political will to establish a national policy on violence against women in the Council of Europe member States. It also notes that the Istanbul Convention, while not yet in force, has already triggered some changes, for example regarding measures of prevention or the provision of support services for victims of violence.

For more information: www.coe.int/conventionviolence

→ FOCUS European Union – Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey on violence against women

“Violence against women, and specifically gender-based violence that disproportionately affects women, is an extensive human rights abuse that the EU cannot afford to overlook.”

(Mr Morten Kjaerum, Director of the FRA)



On 5 March, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights published a survey on violence against women which was based on face-to-face interviews with 42 000 women across the 28 member States of the EU. A picture of extensive abuse, affecting many women's lives, emerges from the report. In the EU, an estimated 13 million women experienced physical violence and 3.7 million women experienced sexual violence in the course of the twelve months preceding the survey interviews. However, these crimes are systematically under-reported to the authorities.

According to the report, 55% of women have been sexually harassed, 18% have been stalked and 43% have faced psychological abuse. In addition, 22% of all women in the EU have experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner.

The FRA survey also shows that one in 10 women has experienced some form of sexual violence after the age of 15, and one in 20 women has been raped after the age of 15.

Given the scale of violence against women reported in the survey, the FRA recommends that violence against women be acknowledged and addressed as a fundamental rights abuse within the framework of the EU's responses to crime and criminal victimisation. The FRA also calls for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by the EU member States and by the EU itself.

→ “Women Free from Violence” Network meetings

“Sexual exploitation of girls”, Strasbourg, 29 January 2014



A hearing on sexual exploitation of girls was organised on 29 January by the Network in co-operation with the Network of Contact Parliamentarians to stop sexual violence against children. Ms Stella Kyriakides, General Rapporteur on Children, underlined the importance of spreading the word throughout national parliaments in order to effect change. Mr Mendes Bota, General Rapporteur on Violence against

Women, added that it is of the utmost importance for parliamentarians to ensure that this issue is put high on the political agenda in their respective countries. The parliamentarians heard moving testimonies from Ms Livia Anonisanu, director of a Romanian NGO, and from Ms Roshan Heiler, director of the SOLWODI counselling centre in Germany, and were given an update by Deputy Secretary General Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni on action being taken by the Council of Europe to fight this scourge.

“The sexual exploitation of girls is one of the most horrendous crimes in our developed countries – but it exists and we have an important role to play in fighting this scourge.”

(Ms Stella Kyriakides, General Rapporteur on Children)

“Focusing on the victims’ needs”, Vienna, 4 March 2014

At its joint meeting with the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination on 4 March in Vienna, the Network held a hearing on focusing on the victims’ needs, which aimed at providing a better understanding of the efforts undertaken at EU level to counter violence against women and presenting the victims’ needs.

Ambassador Luisella Pavan-Woolfe, Head of the Delegation of the EU to the Council of Europe, assured that “the EU is working tirelessly to achieve concrete results against all forms of violence against women”. Ms Till-Tentschert, FRA Programme Manager, presented the main findings of the FRA survey on violence against women in the EU. She underlined that these findings may be used to support victim protection measures and that the lack of awareness of victim support services is one of the reasons explaining the low reporting rate by women who are victims of violence.



During their joint meeting in Vienna, the Network and the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination also held an exchange of views with Ms Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek, Austrian Federal Minister for Education and Women, who presented the Austrian framework of protection of victims and insisted on the key importance of protection and prevention to tackle violence against women. Ms Heinisch-Hosek called on other member States of the Council of Europe to ratify the Istanbul Convention.

“Economic empowerment and independence are essential tools to prevent violence against women and enable victims to come out of violent relationships.”

(Ms Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek, Austrian Federal Minister for Education and Women)

→ Istanbul Convention – Updates

Hungary signed the Istanbul Convention on 14 March. 33 member States of the Council of Europe are now signatories to the convention.

Ms Silvia Bonet Perot informed us that, on 23 January, the General Council of Andorra approved the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Mr Nikolaj Villumsem gave us the same good news concerning the Parliament of Denmark (18 February). The parliamentary procedure was also completed in Spain on 19 February with the approval of ratification by the Senate.



On 13 February, the National Assembly of France approved the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, which has now to be approved by the Senate.

At present, eight countries have ratified the Istanbul Convention. Only two more countries need to deposit their instruments of ratification with the Council of Europe and the Istanbul Convention will enter into force. We hope to have these two ratifications before the summer!