

Parliamentary Network

“Women Free from Violence”

NEWSLETTER – SEPTEMBER 2014



Editorial

On 1 August 2014 the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) came into force.

It sends out a strong signal, across Europe and beyond, to the millions of women victims of violence. It rewards the efforts made over the last few years by the Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Europe and civil society, which have worked to make this innovative instrument more widely known and to raise awareness that violence against women is everyone's concern.

The Istanbul Convention is groundbreaking in more than one respect. For one thing, it recognises violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination. Furthermore, it aims at zero tolerance for this violence by criminalising a whole series of acts: physical violence, sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, coerced abortion and harassment.

But however unique and innovative, to regard it just as a legal instrument would be too simplistic.

The Istanbul Convention has a soul. It constitutes a blueprint for tomorrow's society in which violence inflicted on women will no longer be justified, condoned or trivialised. It will be prevented, combated, punished and finally rejected by all.

To date 22 countries have signed and 14 others have ratified it (Albania, Andorra, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Montenegro, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden and Turkey). I call again on all states which have not yet done so to sign and ratify it without delay.

A new phase is now commencing, the implementation phase. Among other things, legislative measures must be taken to comply with the convention, and the proper resources must be allocated to create more shelters, to train professionals and to support aid associations. The monitoring committee, the GREVIO, must be promptly set up and must receive the full support of the states parties. National parliaments are invited to participate in monitoring the convention, in recognition of the major role that they perform in its implementation. The Parliamentary Assembly will also play its full part in the monitoring, and will keep up its commitment through the unprecedented role of evaluation which this treaty confers on it.

The entry into force of the Istanbul Convention marks an essential milestone in the protection of human rights. It challenges all of us to ensure that this vision of a future without violence becomes a reality as soon as possible, because women victims have already waited too long.

Anne Brasseur,
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe



→ Celebrations to mark the convention's entry into force

"All states need to act now to improve the lives of the many women and girls who are subjected to violence, simply because of their gender."

*Thorbjørn Jagland,
Secretary General of the Council of Europe*

Our members in action

After just over three years of repeated efforts to alert the authorities and public opinion to the problem of violence against women, the members and friends (male and female) of the Network wanted to celebrate the event with a series of activities at national level



Gisela Wurm gives a press conference, in the company of **Rosa Logar**, director of the intervention centre on domestic violence, and **Maria Rösslhuber** from the association of independent shelters for women, Vienna, 28 July.



Interview with **José Mendes Bota** on the Portuguese national channel RTP2 on 31 July, followed by a visit to the NGO Umar, Lisbon, 1 August.



Press conference by **Deborah Bergamini** and **Elena Centemero**, Chamber of Deputies, Rome, 31 July.



Gülsün Bilgehan interviewed on Akdeniz TV, Istanbul, 1 August.

“The entry into force of the Istanbul Convention is to be welcomed [...]. This will not increase women’s safety overnight, but it will definitely mark a turn in the right direction, giving a strong signal of commitment to millions of women.”

Nils Muižnieks,

Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

Ismeta Dervoz meets activists of the NGO United Women based in Banja Luka before giving a press conference with **Samra Filipovic Hadžiabdić**, director of the Gender Equality Agency, 1 August.



Maria Giannakaki talks to the team of the Drapetsona reception centre for women victims of violence, municipality of Keratsini, 1 August.

Serbia: members of the National Assembly committee on human rights, rights of minorities and gender equality celebrate the entry into force of the convention by visiting reception centre B92 on 1 August in Belgrade.

Left to right: **Jagoda Kovalenko**, associate member of B92; **Vesna Stanojević**, co-ordinator of B92; **Biljana Ilić Stošić**, parliamentarian; **Marija Stevanović**, parliamentarian; **Resmija Gagić**, associate member of B92; and **Meho Omerović**, parliamentarian and committee chair.



Carmen Quintanilla Barba gives a press conference and meets the team of a shelter for women victims of violence, Alcázar de San Juan, 26 August.

Conference “Safe from fear, safe from violence”, Rome, 18 and 19 September 2014



A conference to celebrate the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention was organised in Rome on 18 and 19 September by the Council of Europe in partnership with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Parliament. This event brought together numerous personalities who have actively contributed to the promotion of the convention, including **Laura Boldrini**, President of the Chamber of Deputies; **Benedetto Della Vedova**, Italian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs; **Anne Brasseur**, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; **Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni**, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe; and **José Mendes Bota**, General Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on violence against women.

→ Meetings of the Network

Sexual violence against women in armed conflicts, 30 September 2014

“This Convention shall apply in times of peace and in situations of armed conflict.”

Article 2, Istanbul Convention

The topic of the next hearing of the Network will be “Sexual violence against women in armed conflicts”. The guest speakers invited to discuss this issue are **April Pham**, GenCap Advisor at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (Switzerland), **Monika Hauser**, Director of Medica mondiale and recipient of the 2012 North-South Prize of the Council of Europe (Germany) and **Hana Ayele**, member of the network Survivor speak OUT (United Kingdom).

José Mendes Bota will chair the meeting, during which the Deputy Secretary General, **Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni**, will address the Network.

→ Violence against women with disabilities, 24 June 2014

“Violence against women with disabilities is an invisible reality which usually happens in a closed environment away from the world.”

Ana Peláez Narváez

Member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Director of International Relations at the Spanish National Organisation of the Blind (ONCE)



A hearing on the theme of violence against women with disabilities was held during the June session of the Assembly. In the presence of **Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni**, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, members of the Network were able to exchange views via a videoconference direct from Madrid with **Ana Peláez Narváez**, member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Director of International Relations at the Spanish National Organisation of the Blind (ONCE). Ms Peláez said that nearly 80% of women with disabilities were victims of violence (source: European Parliament) and were four times more likely to suffer sexual violence than women without a disability. She stressed that women with mental disabilities were severely exposed to abuse. The second speaker, Emeritus Professor **Gill Hague** from the University of Bristol, presented the results of the first, and so far only, British study on women with disabilities who are victims of domestic violence. The study, carried out by a mixed team including researchers with disabilities in accordance with the principle “Nothing about us without us”, calls for a radical change in cultural attitudes and in the way women with disabilities who suffer abuses are regarded and treated in all European countries. The necessary funds, the tracking and recording of cases of domestic violence and disability, and better training for professionals at all levels, must be integrated with national and local strategies. As a reminder, a report by Carmen Quintanilla Barba on “Equality and inclusion for people with disabilities” is currently being prepared.

“People complain because he takes care of you ... They hesitate to criticise such a saint or to consider him capable of those dreadful things. Perhaps also ... people don’t “see” a woman with a disability as a woman, a partner, a mother. I think that’s why they have trouble imagining that this woman could have been sexually or physically abused by her partner, or been a victim of domestic violence, because disabled women don’t make love, do they?”

Testimony from Disabled women and domestic violence.

Responding to the Experiences of Survivors,

R. Thiara, G. Hague, R. Bashall, B. Ellis and A. Mullender, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012, p. 43.

→ Reports being prepared by the PACE

Focusing on the perpetrators to prevent violence against women

The report “Focusing on the perpetrators to prevent violence against women”, prepared by Athina Kyriakidou (Cyprus, SOC), presents preventive programmes for intervention and treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual offences set up in several Council of Europe member states. These programmes, usually combining group therapy and individual therapy over a long period, are designed to protect potential victims and to further lasting change in the perpetrators’ behaviour. To be effective they must make a point of raising awareness of violence and a sense of responsibility in perpetrators. However, they cannot supplant criminal sanctions commensurate with the seriousness of the offences. Ms Kyriakidou stresses that the programmes intended for perpetrators of violence cannot represent a single, isolated solution. They must be part of a comprehensive effort to combat violence against women and domestic violence. The report will be debated on 18 November 2014 in Brussels at the next meeting of the PACE Standing Committee.

Promoting best practice in tackling violence against women

Rapporteur: José Mendes Bota (Portugal, EPP/CD)

→ 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 visual 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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