

Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence

NEWSLETTER – APRIL 2015

EDITORIAL – Keep up the mobilisation



On 13 February 2015, the police found the burnt body of Özgecan Aslan on a riverbank near Mersin in south-western Turkey. The 20-year-old student had been attacked by the driver of the bus she was travelling home in. He had beaten her to death after attempting to rape her. He subsequently got rid of her body with the aid of two accomplices. This horrific murder provoked huge outrage in Turkey. Women and men took to the streets throughout the country to condemn violence against women and demand that justice be done.

The murders of Özgecan, Jyoti in Delhi and all the unnamed women who die in similar circumstances every day have had a significant impact in societies which are gradually discovering the tragic reality of this violence. The figures do not lie.

In the EU, according to a study published in 2014 by the Fundamental Rights Agency, one in three women has suffered physical and/or sexual violence at least once in her life since the age of 15, one in 10 has suffered some form of sexual violence and one in 20 has been raped. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that between 100 million and 140 million women and girls worldwide have suffered some form of genital mutilation and that almost 400 million women aged 20 to 49 had been married or entered into some type of union before the age of 18.

It has now been 20 years since the 4th World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. The declared aim of that conference was to reassert gender equality and the empowerment of women throughout the world. It ended with the adoption of a declaration and a platform for action. The two documents, which marked an unprecedented advance for women's rights at the time, are still relevant today.

It is vital that we mobilise and harness all our energy and efforts so as to continue slowly but surely along the path that will lead us to a real change in attitudes. It is vital that parliaments establish an effective framework for combating violence and that the resulting legislation is properly enforced so that the crimes in question do not go unpunished. Lastly, as in Beijing in 1995, it is vital to state loudly and clearly that violence against women violates and impairs, or nullifies, women's enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Bear in mind that no country is free from violence against women: it concerns us all.

Gülsün Bilgehan,

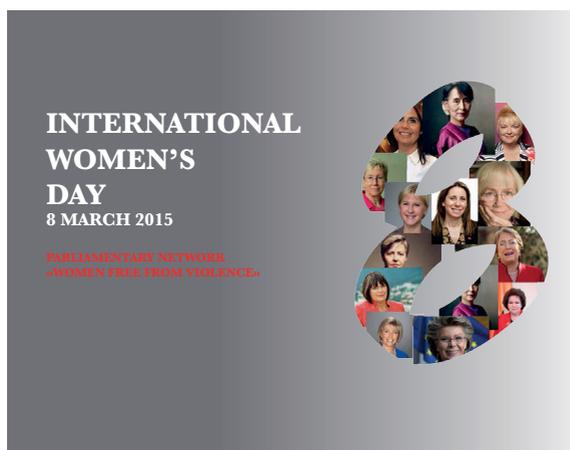
Chair of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe



Istanbul Convention

Monaco / ratification / 7 October 2014 • Estonia / signature / 2 December 2014
Slovenia / ratification / 5 February 2015

→ OUR MEMBERS - #inspiringwomen



To celebrate International Women's Day, portraits of women put forward by our members were published on the Network's Facebook page. They included women our members admire for their action; women who inspired them to enter politics and women they wanted to bring into the spotlight.

It was a way of paying tribute to these women and also of demonstrating the importance of inspiring models and the need for more women to be involved in the public arena.

Thank you to Silvia Bonet-Perot, Cindy Franssen, Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo, Françoise Hetto-Gaasch, Eva Lena-Jansson, Naira Karapetyan, Mechthild Rawert, Chiora Taktakishvili and Gisela Wurm for taking part in this project.

To see the portraits, go to the Network's [Facebook](#) page or website:
www.assembly.coe.int/stopviolence/

→ INTERVIEW – Female genital mutilation: surgery helping women to rebuild their lives

While on a humanitarian mission in Burkina Faso in the 1980s, **Dr Pierre Foldès**, a French urologist and surgeon, was approached by victims of female genital mutilation seeking help. On his return to France, he developed a form of surgery for repairing damage to the clitoris. In over 20 years, he has operated on more than 4 000 women. He founded the Reproductive Health Institute (ISG), which opened near Paris in January 2014, with **Frédérique Martz**, the current director. This institute is designed to help women victims of violence. We interviewed them both.



In your work, have you noticed any changes in recent years?

The main changes include dealing with new types of mutilation which are more specific to different ethnic groups that did not initially have access to medical help, namely women of central African, Asian or North American origin. There have also been technical changes, involving a move towards more complete restoration of the vulva and sexual functions, including repairing damage to the inner labia and/or the perineum. In addition, we have dealt with more cases of so-called non-traditional sexual trauma resulting, for instance, from violence against women or conflict situations (war crimes, rape and torture). Above all, however, it is important to underline the complete change in protocol represented by the holistic, multidisciplinary approach, both in the preoperative phase and during medium and long-term follow-up.

Is operating always the right solution?

Reparative surgery is only one of the options offered to victims of genital mutilation. Like all women victims of violence, they have many needs which are not always stated from the outset. The first stage is always getting them to talk in a secure and caring environment. It is only after these initial exchanges that the range of options and responses are discussed with them. If the option of surgery is chosen, it is covered by a comprehensive, multidisciplinary support protocol, as the women's entire sexuality and identity have to be rebuilt.

What is the situation regarding training for health-care professionals?

Ideally, health-care professionals and, more broadly, all the various players who may be involved in caring for the women need to receive training or information, on several levels. Firstly, in terms of prevention and identifying women victims of genital mutilation, this comes through awareness of the practices and their consequences. In the case of medical students, midwives and carers, this

involves the inclusion of special sections in their training courses. Secondly, general practitioners, gynaecologists and other specialists must be encouraged to provide suitable initial responses and direct the women concerned to the appropriate centres. Lastly, surgeons need to be trained in the reparative surgery technique.

Can you tell us about your institute and its specific work regarding violence against women?

Under the current system, there are many different separate and complex responses to women victims of violence. The result is a dramatically low actual care rate. The institute addresses this problem by providing a place where all women victims of violence can seek help anonymously and free of charge. The initial contact is followed by the proposal of a comprehensive support package, with the women being offered all the necessary care and assistance in medical, psychological, legal and social terms. The institute draws on a team of professionals and undertakes to provide long-term, multidisciplinary follow-up. It includes a nationwide network of correspondents so that cases of violence are identified and detected at the earliest opportunity. Since the institute opened in 2014, it has cared for 360 women.

Harmful practices

Persistent practices and forms of behaviour grounded in discrimination on the basis of gender. They constitute a denial of the dignity of the individual and a violation of human rights, as well as a form of discrimination against women and children.

Female genital mutilation, circumcision or genital cutting: practices involving partially or wholly removing the external female genitalia or otherwise injuring the female genital organs for non-medical or non-health reasons.

Child marriage or early marriage: any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age.

Forced marriage: any marriage in which one or both of the parties have not personally expressed their full, free and informed consent to the union.

Crimes committed in the name of so-called honour: acts of violence committed disproportionately, although not exclusively, against girls and women because family members consider that some suspected, perceived or actual behaviour will bring dishonour to the family or community.

Source: Joint general recommendation/general comment No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices, November 2014

→ EVENTS

Network meeting – Forced marriages, Thursday 23 April 2015

Article 37 of the Istanbul Convention

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the intentional conduct of forcing an adult or a child to enter into a marriage is criminalised.



While forced marriages mainly concern the poorest countries – primarily in South Asia and West Africa – Europe is also affected. During the April 2015 parliamentary session in Strasbourg, the Network will welcome two experts to discuss this topical issue:

- **Lucy Monaghan**, Head of the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU). The FMU is a joint Foreign Office and Home Office unit set up in January 2005 which operates both inside the United Kingdom and overseas,

where assistance is provided to victims of forced marriage. It runs an emergency helpline for victims and professionals dealing with cases, as well as an extensive training programme on the subject.

- **Ellen Høvik**, Campaign Manager at Plan Norway. In 2014, her NGO organised a campaign against child marriage which had a huge impact in the media and among the general public.

Anyone interested in attending the hearing should contact us by 20 April 2015 at: womenfreefromviolence@coe.int

#CSW 59 #Beijing+20

World Conferences on Women

The United Nations has organised four world conferences on women. These took place in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted unanimously by 189 countries, is an agenda for women's empowerment and is considered the key global policy document on gender equality. Source: www.unwomen.org



This year, the UN Commission on the Status of Women undertook a review of progress made in the implementation of the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**, 20 years after its adoption at the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995. Some Network members ([Carmen Quintanilla Barba](#), [Sahiba Gafarova](#)) were present.

A side event on Gender stereotypes and sexism, held jointly by the Council of Europe and the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations, addressed ways and means of breaking gender stereotypes and tackling institutional and everyday sexism, while exploring the link between achieving de facto equality and combating violence against women. For more details: www.coe.int

Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy:

The key points highlighted in the 2014 implementation progress report include the entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and the holding of two conferences on media and the image of women and on combating gender stereotypes in education. For more details: www.coe.int

Reports under preparation – Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Promoting best practices in tackling violence against women, Sahiba Gafarova

Systematic collection of data on violence against women, Maria Edera Spadoni



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