

→ Upcoming events

Tirana (Albania), 14 September 2012

Next meeting of the Parliamentary Network "Women Free from Violence" - Launch of the Handbook for parliamentarians on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

→ Petition for the signature and ratification of the Istanbul Convention

The Network has launched the following petition. Please circulate it in your country and collect as many signatures as possible to support it.

"SAVE MILLIONS OF LIVES,
SIGN AND RATIFY THE CONVENTION"

Freedom from violence should be the first human right.

The "Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence" is the most comprehensive international instrument in this field. It includes a wide range of measures in the area of prevention of violence, protection of the victims, prosecution of the offenders and integrated politics. If it entered into force, it would save the lives of millions of women, in Europe and the world.

The Convention was opened for signature on 11 May 2011, in Istanbul. Ten ratifications are necessary for its entry into force. The higher the number of states that ratify it, the higher the number of women who will be able to benefit from it.

We, the undersigned, strongly call on the government of _____ to sign the Convention, and the parliament to ratify it as soon as possible.

Let us take action. Let women be free from fear, free from violence.

→ Call for funds

Call for voluntary contributions to support the activities of the Network

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 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), 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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NEWSLETTER 1 – June 2012

Freedom from violence



Violence against women, including domestic violence, is one of the most serious forms of human rights violations in Europe and one of the most widespread crimes. And yet, social pressure is so strong that many victims accept it as an unavoidable fact of life and refrain from reporting it. Others, who find the courage to ask for the authorities' help, are not taken seriously. Others cannot find protection and justice, due loopholes in their countries' legal and policy framework.

The Parliamentary Network "Women Free from Violence" is made up of 49 parliamentarians who believe that freedom from violence is the first human right. Violence against women deprives victims of their dignity. It deprives them of the confidence to claim their equality. No woman will ever be able to enjoy human rights as long as she is a victim of violence.

We have to break this vicious circle of violence and inequality.

Let it be our cause, that freedom from violence becomes a reality and not only a right.

Mendes Bota

Political Co-ordinator of the Network

General Rapporteur on violence against women



→ NEWS

The United Kingdom signs the Istanbul Convention



The United Kingdom signed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence on 8 June 2012.

To date, Turkey is the only country which has signed and ratified the Convention, while 20 others have signed it. They include

Albania, Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. 10 ratifications, 8 of which from Council of Europe member states, are necessary for the Convention to enter into force.

The Network opens to the Mediterranean



The Parliamentary Network "Women Free from Violence" opened to the Mediterranean and welcomed partners for democracy: both the Moroccan Parliament and the Palestinian National Council appointed members in May 2012. Ms Najat Alastal, representative of the Palestinian National Council, and Ms Jamila El Mossalli, member of the Moroccan Parliament, officially joined the Network.

Mr Mendes Bota, General Rapporteur on violence against women and Political Coordinator of the Parliamentary Network, welcomed the new members and expressed his satisfaction at the prospect of joining forces with partners for democracy to combat violence against women and domestic violence.

When giving its opinions on the requests for partner for democracy status, the former Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men stressed that violence against women was a widespread and underreported phenomenon both in Morocco and in the Palestinian Territories and that a comprehensive effort should be made to raise awareness, amongst legislators as well as society at large, that violence against women is not acceptable. "I encourage the Moroccan and Palestinian authorities to increase their efforts in combating this scourge and I assure them that they can count on the support of the Parliamentary Network", said Mr Mendes Bota.

June meeting of the Network: hearing on marital rape

The Network held a hearing on marital rape on 28 June 2012 in Strasbourg. Professor Liz Kelly, from the London Metropolitan University, presented the historical and legal aspects of marital rape and casted a light on stereotypes surrounding this form of violence. Gilles Lazimi, general practitioner, illustrated the first TV and Web campaign on marital rape in France, which he coordinated in 2011. The presentations were followed by an exchange of views with the parliamentarians.



"At its meeting in Paris on 4 June, the Committee expressed great appreciation for the commitment made by the French authorities to make the introduction of a new law on sexual harassment a priority and to ensure that a bill is placed on the agenda of parliament at the earliest opportunity following the June parliamentary election.

While acknowledging that the provisions of the Labour Code relating to sexual harassment at work in the private sector as well as those of the Criminal Code on sexual aggression continue to apply, the Committee regretted the consequences of the repeal of the law on sexual

harassment by the French Constitutional Council. This decision not only has deprived a great number of victims of a legal basis to seek redress against this specific form of violence but has also resulted in the immediate cancellation of all ongoing criminal proceedings, causing distress in the victims concerned and increasing the risk of impunity for the perpetrators.

The Committee also called on the French authorities to step up efforts towards the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), which was signed by France on 11 May 2011, as a sign of their commitment to eradicate violence against women and promote de iure and de facto gender equality. In any case, the French authorities should ensure that the new legislation on sexual harassment is fully in line with the Istanbul Convention".

New Gender Equality Commission



The first meeting of the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe (GEC) was held from 6 to 8 June 2012 in Strasbourg. The Commission, which includes 16 members, is expected to play a key role in promoting the implementation of Council of Europe standards in the field of gender equality. During the meeting, which saw the participation of the Secretary General and the Deputy

Secretary General, GEC decided to include violence against women amongst its main priorities.

Sexual harassment in France

Following an exchange of views with Ms Bourzai, an active member of the Network, the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination approved the following declaration on the urgency of introducing legislation on sexual harassment in France.