

**29th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of justice**  
**“Breaking the silence – united against domestic violence”**  
Tromsø, 18-19 June 2009

**SPEECH**

**Mr Knut Storberget, Minister of Justice, NORWAY**

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,

Welcome to Tromsø!

I am pleased and honoured to see all of you here. Many of you have travelled a long distance to come here to this Arctic city, situated in the very northern corner of Europe. Even in the Norwegian delegation, we have travelled a long way. In fact, the distance from Oslo to Tromsø is about the same as the distance from Oslo to Strasbourg.

Many of you are experiencing the northern part of Norway, and perhaps also Norway, for the first time. I wish you a pleasant stay and I hope you will have the opportunity to enjoy the beautiful sceneries that surrounds the city, and time to connect with representatives of other delegations.

**Domestic violence**

We are joined here to address a severe form of crime. Why is domestic violence such a severe crime? First, the violence is often very brutal and severe – in many cases more brutal than the violence that is taking place on the streets. Second, the perpetrator is someone whom the victim is supposed to trust. The disruption of trust – and love – is often what hurts the most. Finally, the violence takes place at home – in the place where any person should feel safe.

**The silence**

Yet, the violence that happens in the street makes headlines, the everyday life of domestic violence rarely does. It only does when the violence ends in loss of life. And even then it is often described as a “family tragedy”, not as the brutal and severe crime it actually is.

Domestic violence is surrounded by silence, as mirrored in the title of this conference. It is invisible – as if it does not exist. I have mentioned the media. The victim, herself, is often too frightened or too ashamed to speak about it. School, health care and others who get in touch with the victim are reluctant to intervene. So are neighbours, friends and other members of the local community. The indifference and the lack of recognition of the seriousness of domestic violence within politics and within our legal institutions is yet another expression of the silence.

The aim of this conference is to break the silence. I am very pleased to note that there is no longer any need for further discussions on the importance of addressing domestic violence in the context of justice policy. Nor do I see the need for discussing whether or not domestic violence is a human rights issue. I am confident that we have reached a point where we all agree that domestic violence is a concern to human rights as well as a matter of justice policy.

At this conference it is therefore my hope that we bring the discussions on one step further. The crucial questions are: How do we protect the victim from the violence and how do we empower the victim?

#### International cooperation

In our endeavours to put an end to the violence, it is of uttermost importance that we join forces and efforts and cooperate, both across the lines that divide different policy sectors and across borderlines. We must - as the title of this conference expresses - be united against domestic violence

In the context of the Council of Europe's campaign to combat violence against woman, several initiatives have been taken by the member states. Many countries have recognised violence against woman as a public policy concern and have introduced legal and policy measures to protect woman from abuse. Many member states have also taken initiatives to raise public awareness, while others have only recently started to address this issue systematically. Regardless of where we are in the process in each country, we agree on one thing - violence against women is undoubtedly a human rights violation and must be combated.

I am grateful that so many of you have sent us material from your national campaigns on domestic violence. We are displaying some of the material here at the conference site. I hope you will take the opportunity during these two days to have a closer look at the exhibitions of posters and campaign material, the short campaign films being displayed on a monitor and the longer films being displayed in a separate room. In your conference files, you will find a program for when and where the films are being displayed.

I have a sincere hope that we, during this conference, will be able to further exchange lessons and experiences and find better ways to combat violence against woman. The use of technical devices in protecting the victims is one example where I believe we could benefit from closer cooperation between the member states. We have a lot to learn from each other, and in our discussions we should aim to share and discuss examples of "best practices".

The fact that we are gathered here is a statement of our commitment to be united against domestic violence. I am pleased to know that a new Council of Europe convention, which includes domestic violence, is being negotiated. I trust that the working group on the prevention and protection of violence against women and domestic violence is able to reach consensus on a strong and effective legal instrument in the course of the next two years.

#### Women and children as victims

Domestic violence is gender based because it affects women disproportionately. In a very recent and groundbreaking judgement by the European court of human rights (issued last week) the court recognised domestic violence as a gender based crime. On that ground it held that lack of adequate protection to victims of domestic violence amounted to a violation of the prohibition against discrimination under article 14 of the Convention. I believe this is a very valid and important perspective.

It is, however, equally important that we protect the children who witness domestic violence. Partly, because many women are mothers. But most importantly because of the devastating consequences it has on a child to witness the father abusing the mother. Children who are witnesses to domestic violence must be recognised as independent victims.

I would like to finish by introducing two young men who know what it is like to be exposed to violence at home. Hakan Pandul and Kenneth Holt were both experiencing violence in their childhoods. Today, as grown-ups, they have formed the rap group "Tonna Brix". They are making, and performing their own music in an effort to heal the wounds from many years back. They are visiting schools and youth

clubs with their music, and they are telling their stories to the children and youth in an effort to bring help and comfort to those who need it. You will listen to their song "Turning point", performed partly in Norwegian and partly in English. You will find the lyrics in English and French on the table in front of you (?).

Please welcome "Tonna Brix".