

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

**SPEECH**

**Mr Günther KRUG, Vice-President  
of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe**

Mr Chairman,

Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I address you today, I speak in the name of the cities and regions of Europe, of more than 200,000 territorial communities of our continent which my assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, represents. They are your natural partners in ensuring good governance of our societies, in making sure that our democracies function properly and in dealing with all aspects of governance, including combating domestic violence.

The theme of today's Conference is of crucial importance to all of us. However, it has a particular meaning to us in the Congress because local and regional authorities are in the frontline in dealing with this scourge, having to face and fight it on a daily basis in our communities. With their first-hand experience, they have a great deal to contribute to your work as the “social actors”, dealing with social repercussions of your policies and measures in cities and regions, and having local services to offer in order to tailor these measures to the needs of their communities.

We would like you to listen to their proposals. The Congress is not new to the issue, having participated in the Council of Europe campaign against domestic violence which finished last year. In fact, as part of this larger campaign, the Congress ran its own campaign “European cities and regions take a stand against domestic violence”, with the participation of communities across the continent.

We are convinced that the output of the local dimension of the campaign needs to be taken on board by national governments and parliaments when working out preventive measures against domestic violence, and that local and regional authorities must be involved early on in regular consultations on domestic violence issues. Indeed, they are essential in adapting the panoply of preventive measures to the realities on the ground, and in raising the awareness of their communities about both the problem and the remedies, about the existing framework for prevention and treatment and available local services.

Some proposals are already being put into practice – I could give such examples as the call for action to end violence against women and consultations launched by the Mayor of London within The Way Forward project, or the recent creation of so-called “brigades”, or intervention units, to fight family violence in France. There are many more examples like this across Europe, all pointing to one major achievement: the taboo on speaking about domestic violence has been broken, it is no longer seen as a private matter or a family issue. Domestic violence is a crime, and as such is a matter of public policy and public concern, even of public health, if you will.

However, another question is how to deal with it. Preventive measures and treatment of victims, such as the issues discussed at this Conference, are absolutely necessary, but they must be coupled with handling the root causes of this scourge. Domestic violence takes place within families, and, from this viewpoint, this Conference is interlinked with the Conference of Ministers responsible for Family Affairs, which has just finished its work in Vienna this week and to which the Congress has also contributed. I believe that we should look for synergies between these two fields of competence which are clearly related.

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Whether it is the question of preventive measures or family policies, their results are felt in our territorial communities, and their success depends on the level of their acceptance by these communities. Against this background, coupled with the ongoing and accelerating decentralisation processes, it is of the utmost importance that local and regional authorities be endowed with proper competences but also the necessary financial and human resources, to make sure that they can fulfil their responsibilities in this area. And it is equally important that the local and regional dimension be reflected in the legal framework to fight domestic violence, such as a legally binding instrument.

This is why in March, the Congress in line with the Parliament Assembly of the Council of Europe, gave its full support to the idea of elaborating a convention preventing domestic violence against women.

Needless to say, we in the Congress are very satisfied to have been included in the drafting group, and to contribute. We have already made several suggestions concerning the future text that are being accepted, and we are pleased that after intense discussions, the delegations have reached a consensus on the scope of this future instrument.

Essentially, at this stage, we strongly believe that the convention should stipulate that local and regional authorities be given the power and financial resources to apply national legislation effectively; that inter-institutional cooperation between different services and players be established at all levels – national, regional and local; that proper training be provided also for local and regional government staff and elected representatives; and that special attention be paid to the situation of women belonging to vulnerable groups.

We look forward to continuing our participation in the preparation of the convention, and we shall continue to stand side by side with you, with national governments and

parliaments and NGOs in the ongoing fight against domestic violence – the fight that we can only win together.

Thank you.