

**29th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of justice  
"Breaking the silence – united against domestic violence"**

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**SPEECH**

**Ms Carina HÄGG, Chairperson of the PACE  
Sub-Committee on violence against women**

Dear Chairperson, Ministers, Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and my honour to address you on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. I would first of all like to thank the Norwegian authorities for their hospitality and for putting the issue of domestic violence in the limelight, to which the Parliamentary Assembly pays special attention.

Allow me in this presentation to highlight how the Parliamentary Assembly and national parliaments of the Council of Europe member states can and should be key players in the fight against domestic violence, together with governments, local and regional authorities and NGOs.

Fundamental human rights need to be protected everywhere, in the public and the private spheres. No breach of human rights should be allowed, whether it happens in the street or behind closed doors. No custom, no religion, no tradition should justify that men, women or children are deprived of their fundamental human rights. It is indeed high time to "break the silence on domestic violence".

In this context, we, parliamentarians, have a special role to play: in our parliaments, we can speak out, denounce violations of human rights and we can change the legal framework. In the past years, the Parliamentary Assembly has taken a firm stand on the issue of domestic violence - and stressed the fact that domestic violence disproportionately affects women, as a result of an imbalance of power between women and men. It is assumed that domestic violence against women affects 80 millions of women across Europe. Domestic violence against women can therefore be seen as one of the most widespread - and hidden - violations of human rights in Europe.

The Parliamentary Assembly and 40 national parliaments implemented the parliamentary dimension of the Council of Europe Campaign "Stop domestic violence against women" from 2006 to 2008. More than 200 parliamentary activities were carried out in Europe during the campaign. Thanks to a network of contact parliamentarians appointed by the parliaments, the message conveyed by the Council of Europe could be delivered efficiently in many member states. Indeed, the network of contact parliamentarians was renewed this year, and held its first meeting only one month ago in Istanbul, determined to continue to combat violence against women.

Within their parliaments and in their constituencies, parliamentarians did a great deal of work to break the silence and to denounce publicly - and explicitly - what remains too often accepted by society, because of the traditional perception of women and men's role in society.

The latest activities carried out by the Parliamentary Assembly have, unfortunately, shown that violence against women remains a pressing issue: recently, the Assembly adopted Resolutions and Recommendations on "action to combat gender-based human rights violations, including abduction of women and girls", "Sexual violence against women in armed conflicts" and "Femicides". At its June part-session next week, the Assembly will debate a report on "The urgent need to combat so-called "honour crimes"" and a further report on "Migrant women: at particular risk of domestic violence" should be presented this autumn.

These latest reports, but also the lessons drawn from the parliamentary dimension of the Council of Europe Campaign, lead us to the same conclusions: given the scale and nature of the violence committed against women, combating violence against women, especially in the private sphere, must be enhanced in Europe with a legally binding instrument. Therefore the Assembly unanimously supported in October 2008 the drafting of a Council of Europe Convention to combat the most severe and widespread forms of violence against women, in particular domestic violence against women - that means between partners or former partners, cohabiting or not. The Assembly proposed that the convention also cover sexual assaults (including rape and 'marital rape') and harassment, forced marriages, so-called 'honour crimes' and female genital mutilation. Such a convention should "encompass the gender dimension and address the specific nature of gender-based violence".

Today, I am glad to see that the Ad hoc Committee on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CAHVIO) has come to the same conclusions: domestic violence disproportionately affects women, in their homes, in their communities, in their intimate relationships. The Council of Europe convention should thus focus on the elimination of violence against women. I would like to pay tribute to the work that has been done by the CAHVIO. The unanimously adopted interim report constitutes an excellent basis for further discussions.

With PACE Rapporteur José Mendes Bota, the Assembly contributed with enthusiasm and determination to the work of the CAHVIO. The Committee of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men had adopted a first position on the scope of a future convention on 29 April, and will adopt a position on the interim report at its next meeting of 22 June. In my capacity as Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on Violence against Women, I would like to welcome the proposal to draft a comprehensive convention, focusing on the elimination of violence against women, and dealing "with domestic violence which affects women disproportionately". The 3 "Ps" approach is essential to protect victims, prosecute perpetrators and prevent such violations of human rights. The inclusion of a 4th P, encouraging the parties to the Convention to develop "integrated and co-ordinated policies to promote gender equality" could help draft a comprehensive convention, tackling the roots of the problem.

Of course, we are aware that other vulnerable groups in society are affected by domestic violence, such as children or elderly persons. My conviction is that a future convention on the elimination of violence against women should not prevent the Council of Europe and the member states from taking additional initiatives to address these issues and today's Ministerial Conference will provide an opportunity to discuss further possibilities.

The Parliamentary Assembly is more involved than ever in supporting the efforts to draw up a Convention which can effectively combat the most widespread and most severe forms of violence against women. The Assembly is determined to support the efforts of the CAHVIO, and to support your efforts to enhance the level of protection of victims in member states.

- We can offer to mobilise a network of contact parliamentarians who will relay the messages and action of the Council of Europe efforts in the national parliaments.
- The members of the PACE Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men will continue to play a leading role to promote the drafting, the signing and the ratification of a future convention focusing on the elimination of violence against women - and they have already expressed the wish to be associated, in one way or another, to the monitoring of the convention at national level.

When combating violence against women, member states are securing the rule of law for millions of human beings. With a convention focusing on the elimination of violence against women, I believe that the Council of Europe will be a key player on the international scene to further promote gender equality and fundamental human rights. It is also our duty to send out this strong, unambiguous message to the rest of the world. Let me invite here the Ministers of Justice to support the current drafting of a convention covering all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence which disproportionately affects women. Impunity must be eradicated from Council of Europe member states. United, we can make a difference.  
Thank you for your attention.