

Opening statement

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, it is with great pleasure that I **welcome you** to this expert conference on sexual violence against women and children in sport.

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights starts as follows:

"All human beings are born **free** and **equal** in dignity and rights"

I believe that **submission** and **inequality** breed violence against women and violence against children. It is only by conquering freedom and equality that women and children will be free from violence and fear.

Interpersonal violence is a complex phenomenon with many ramifications and deep root causes. For very good reasons, the Council of Europe has paid particular attention to violence against women and violence against children.

These two phenomena have a number of common elements:

1. Both are a violation of the victims' human rights and dignity
2. Both are widespread and often socially tolerated
3. In both cases, there is inequality and an abuse of power
4. Both call for an integrated approach including prevention, protection prosecution and participation.

Moreover, it is important to note that violence against women and against children are often part of a continuum of violence. Gender-based violence disproportionately affects both women **and girls**. Violence against women also affects children who witness it. And gender inequality is one of the root causes of both violence against women and violence against children, in particular of sexual violence.

Notwithstanding these many common elements, we must address violence against women and violence against children as two different phenomena. Let's quickly check some differences:

Violence against women

As stated in the Council of Europe Convention on preventing violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention), violence against women:

- Is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, with male dominance over women
- Is gender-based: it is addressed to women because they are women

- It's entertained by gender inequality. Although, at least in Europe we can consider that we have reached de jure gender equality, we are far from de facto gender equality
- Has an important link with socially constructed roles for women and men.

Violence against children

- Children are particularly vulnerable to violence because of their difficulties to defend themselves. They depend from adults and care institutions, in particular in the early ages. When the family and the state do not play their empowering and protective role, they easily become victims of abuse, exploitation and neglect.
- Children are not mini human beings with mini human rights. As any individual, a child is a human rights holder. However, social norms still consider children as an extension of their family, as people in the making that must conform to adults' expectations. As a result, children in many countries have no right to equal protection under the law. The legality of corporal punishment in 13 countries in Europe is a manifestation of this.

It is critical to understand the respective specificities of violence against women and violence against children to then design the necessary prevention and protection measures, to fight impunity and to engage with all key stakeholders. When doing so, we must also aim at developing mutually reinforcing strategies. Progress achieved in the elimination of violence against women will also help to eliminate violence against children. And vice-versa.

70 years ago, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the founders of the **Council of Europe** thought that the best way to secure lasting peace and social and economic progress in Europe was through the promotion of **shared values**. These values were (and still are): human rights, democracy and rule of law.

70 years later, Europe is the continent with the most advanced human rights standards and monitoring mechanisms. We have improved legislations and policies, developed democratic institutions and put in place sophisticated systems to guarantee the rule of law. Our intergovernmental committees allow our member states to discuss and respond to existing and emerging challenges, to review progress in the implementation of standards and share experiences and good practices.

During these two days, we are going to zoom-in a bit closer on the issue of interpersonal violence and study the issues of sexual violence against women and against children **in sport**.

We'll be reminded of the most advanced international standards adopted by the Council of Europe to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) and to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse (the Lanzarote Convention). We'll see how these legally binding documents apply to the field of sport.

These treaties are complemented by a solid normative framework to prevent and respond to violence against women and children in sport. It includes:

- The Ministers of Sport Resolution on the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse of women, young people and children in sport (2000)
- The Committee of Ministers Recommendation on gender mainstreaming in sport (2015)
- The Ministers of Sport Resolution on Sport and human Rights (2018)
- The Committee of Ministers Recommendation to prevent and combat sexism (2019)
- PACE Resolution "Stop hate speech and acts of hatred in sport" (2019)

During these days, we'll review existing research on sexual violence in sport and we'll explore concrete ways to implement the standards that I mentioned through concrete policies, strategies, programmes and procedures at work in member states, clubs, federations and other sports organisations.

At the Council of Europe, we believe it is extremely important to listen to the voices of survivors of sexual violence and to create a safe environment for those who wish to share their experience and advice with us. Allow me to extend our special thanks to Ms Tineke

Sonck for joining us in Helsinki. I count on all of you to carefully listen to her and make her feel safe.

And last, but not least, I am also very much looking forward to the debate with our panellists, and to benefit from their critical insight in the topics of our conference. I hope you will ask them very difficult questions!

Dear participants,

Since its creation, the Enlarged Partial Agreement in Sport (EPAS) has invested in mainstreaming both gender equality and children's rights in sport. Through our Joint Programmes with the EU, we have developed a number of important tools that are helping our Member states and sports organisations to make concrete progress towards the elimination of gender and other forms of inequality, violence against women and violence against children. We'll present you some of these tools.

At their Conference in Tbilissi last year, the Ministers responsible for sport from the CoE member states, adopted a resolution on Human Rights in Sport. This resolution recalls that Member states and sports organisations have a responsibility to protect human rights and to remedy to any violations. It identifies a number of priority areas for future work, including to promote gender equality and children's rights. Also of interest is the call to address the protection of whistle blowers in sport.

As you know, the Council of Europe is a regional organisation but it has a **global outreach**. Its work is becoming more and more relevant for other regions in the world and at global level. Four reasons for this:

- First, because of the **universality of the values** the Council of Europe stands for.
- Second, because some of the main **threats** to these values cannot be efficiently combated without international co-operation: cybercrime, corruption, doping, terrorism and trafficking in human beings are telling examples;
- Third, because many of the **problems that we face are common** to virtually all countries, regardless of the different social, economic or political contexts. Violence against women and children belongs to this category;
- And fourth, because solutions are in the hands of **key stakeholders** that, while legally established in Europe, **operate at global level**. This is certainly the case of many members of the sport movement.

The Council of Europe is fully committed to support the implementation of the **2030 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development**. Eliminating violence against women and children are important targets of the Sustainable Development Goals. I am convinced that Sport has a huge role to play in this effort and we must leverage its transformative power to progress towards a world free from violence.

The 2030 Agenda calls for a broad mobilisation. I am delighted to welcome to this conference representatives from the European Commission, from governments, parliaments and the sport movement, researchers and children's rights and women's rights activists. I am particularly pleased that we are meeting in Helsinki. This is not by chance. Over the years, Finland has been one of the main supporters of the Council of Europe work in the fields of children's rights and gender equality. I am very pleased that we bring sport in this equation within the framework of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

I started by quoting the first part of Article one of the **Universal Declaration of human rights**: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"

The second part is really important: "They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood »

So: I hope we can prove right the drafters of the Universal Declaration and that we shall use our reason and our conscience to build just and peaceful societies, where nobody must fear and endure violence.

Thank you very much