

## Event on “Calling men and boys into Gender Equality - How can parliamentarians be agents of change?”

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First of all, I would like to **thank the Icelandic authorities and the Nordic Council of Ministers** for organising this event: the second in a series addressing the role of men and boys in improving gender equality.

Special thanks to Ambassador Arnljótsdóttir, dear Raga, for recognising the importance of bringing our parliamentarians into the conversation and proposing we hold this event during the session.

Thanks also to Luxembourg’s Foreign Minister, Xavier Bettel, for having participated in the event – it is crucial that men who are not only decision makers but also leaders of opinion speak out, to encourage more men and boys to “live equality” in their daily actions.

This of course is even more necessary now, when there is real pushback from other influential actors on the world scene, and backsliding in certain spheres that put all we have stood for at risk.

The Parliamentary Assembly, I am happy to say, has worked long and hard on this important topic.

Last year, the Assembly adopted a Resolution on “***The role and responsibility of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence against women and girls***”.

The report highlighted what we already know: violence against women and girls, online and offline, is increasing and is mostly perpetrated by men and

boys. This plain fact alone should be enough to mobilise all of us. We must do more if we want a real change in the situation.

The Assembly has also repeatedly called for the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, which states in its Article 12(4) that all members of society, but especially men and boys, should be encouraged to contribute actively to preventing violence against women.

**Men and boys must assume their important role as agents of change:**

- by speaking out against harmful practices;
- by acting as role models;
- and by challenging sexism.

**Men are often best placed to call on other men** to participate in the fight against gender-based violence, and to set an example. And I'm happy to say that some are doing so, as you have heard from Equimundo's Gary Barker speaking before me.

All men, including those in positions of political, economic, social or cultural power, must be part of the response and participate in changing mindsets, behaviours and social norms in order to prevent and combat gender-based violence.

**We need to integrate and mainstream gender equality**, and the role of men in achieving it, therefore **it is also crucial to have male role models** who show that they share care responsibilities and promote gender equality within the family and at work.

We know that **without the involvement of men and their understanding of the importance of their role, there will be only limited progress**. More men must participate in these debates and be more active in promoting gender equality, every day and at every level.

**Because gender stereotypes apply to men and boys, women and girls alike, which can combine with models of harmful masculinity in a very toxic mixture.**

The rejection of harmful masculinities and the promotion of mindful masculinities should be part of the public debate and we should be leading it, to stand up against the populist and masculinist models that seem to be thriving today.

**As Parliamentarians, we are influential public figures and legislators, and have special responsibility for contributing to gender justice and mobilising society for gender equality.**

The Parliamentary Assembly has called on **national parliaments** to take decisive measures to ensure that parliaments are **free of gender-based violence and sexism**, and has encouraged them to organise awareness-raising events on the responsibility of men and boys in preventing and stopping gender-based violence.

The Assembly has also addressed **political parties**, calling them to adopt a **zero-tolerance policy on gender-based violence** as well as promoting the **participation of women in their decision-making bodies**.

On a more positive note, looking at gender statistics at the opening of our annual sessions, I am proud to announce that **women are now equal with men as full members and as alternate members of the Assembly**.<sup>1</sup> So in our Assembly, there is a clear realisation that sharing roles and responsibilities, and empowering women is a positive development, and is not a sign of a loss of power for anyone.

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<sup>1</sup> 50% women full members and 48% alternates

**Once we have integrated these ideas we need to lead by example and send a strong message** to our citizens that gender stereotypes, sexism, violence against women and the perpetuation of gender inequalities have no future in our countries, nor in our continent. This is a long-term objective which gets closer with the actions, laws and policies we adopt and apply every day. Let us work together to make this cultural change a reality.

There are many ways to do this, and to change mindsets we need to be proactive. As a parliamentarian I know the importance of **parliamentary debates, awareness campaigns and gender equality policies and initiatives**. As a journalist and academic, I know the power of **the media, of social networks, video clips, cinema, theatre, music**, all of these creative and visual channels which can contribute to winning hearts and minds.

**Sports clubs and federations must be involved in the fight against gender-based stereotypes, cultural programmes should address gender roles, media outlets must react to sexist remarks and behaviour. There must be education on gender equality from the youngest age, teachers need training on gender equality. Age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education should be provided and address gender-based stereotypes, as well as the concept of consent in intimate relationships.**

Measures that should be part of policies, laws and practices also include **awareness-raising campaigns on the responsibility of men and boys in preventing and combating gender-based violence, including as bystanders** and, very importantly, preventive intervention and **treatment programmes for perpetrators of violence** against women and girls, based on international standards. National strategies must include measures to promote responsibility and the role of men and boys in countering this violence, with dedicated budgets.

As regards our ongoing work, we are preparing new reports on **“Eliminating gender stereotypes in the media”**, **“Sexual violence against men and boys”**, **“Promoting the Istanbul Convention and improving its implementation: building on lessons learned”**, **“Artificial intelligence and gender equality: risks and challenges”** and **“Violent pornography”**. All of them are relevant as regards the role of men and boys in gender equality and I invite you all to engage with the Assembly as we discuss these important topics in the next months.

As men, **we are not all the same, so there is no “one size fits all” solution** for including men and boys in the conversation and in the action for equality. But we can all integrate in our own way the principles that equality demands, we can “think equality”, “share the care”, forget the superior attitudes that come from erroneous feelings of entitlement.

Thank you for your attention, Ladies and gentlemen.