

D E C L A R A T I O N

Adopted at the International conference under the theme of „Institutions, Media and Society United in Combating Violence Against Women“, November 26-27, 2015, Sofia, Bulgaria, organized by Women Lawyers Association jointly with the Council of Sofia Bar Association, under the patronage of the National Ombudsman Maya Manolova, of the Mayor of Sofia Yordanka Fandukova and the Milan Bar Association, Italy, supported by the Supreme Bar Council, in partnership with International Federation of Women in Legal Careers (FIFCJ), Italian Association of Women Lawyers, Italian Association of Women in Legal careers, Ladies' Diplomatic Club of Friendship, Friendship Association Between Bulgarian and Turkish Women, "Charity, Chic & Cozy" Foundation, as well as other organizations, involved in this field,

The International conference „Institutions, Media and Society United in Combating Violence Against Women“ was organized with regard to November 25th, declared by the UN as the International Day for Eliminating Violence Against Women and in support of The Convention of the Council of Europe on Prevention and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as The Istanbul Convention.

After summarizing and recognizing the facts and data about the nature, the forms and the scale of violence against women, the existing issues and obstacles, in consideration of the speeches given and the discussions between the participants, the meeting conducted on 27.11.2015, established the following:

a. The existence and the extension of the phenomenon of "violence against women and domestic violence" in all its forms and aspects within the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as its nature of a global social and health issue;

b. The epidemic scale this negative phenomenon expands to, despite being unrealistically depicted in both media and statistics, because of the delicacy of the issue, the lack of willingness of the victims to confess due to fear, vulnerability, lack of effective legal assistance and legal protection of the victims, the ineffective punishment of the violators and other undeclared reasons as well;

c. Lack of coordination and joint efforts of the authorities, institutions, NGOs and citizens envolved in the combat against this form of violence;

d. Insufficient effective legislation ensuring the effective protection of the victims of violence, lack of mechanisms and measures to protect and prevent violence against women and domestic violence;

e. Insufficient material, medical, social and psychological support to victims;

f. Existence of actual issues, contradictions and imperfections in the existing legislation and legal practice in case of violence against women with regard to the fact that the majority of the cases of violence occur at home without being witnessed, making it hard to identify and therefore to sanction;

g. Inability to enforce the judicial act, under which the court obliges the violator to withhold from violence only against the victim, and no one else, to whom the violator seems unpunishable and the phenomenon is often repeated;

h. Existence of highly vulnerable social groups /girls and women under guardianship/ who need special life guarantees and protection;

i. Lack of synchronization of Bulgarian legislation with the EU regulations in the area of violence against women and domestic violence;

k. Inadequate media coverage of the issue in order to provoke public discussion, rebellion against the phenomenon of "violence against women" and the violators, due to lack of data on the social, gender, education, ethnicity or any other modality of violence, reluctance for public disclosure of victims as well as the use of inappropriate language and means of coverage;

In view of the above, in assessing the fact that violence against women presents violation of the fundamental human rights of life, safety, freedom, dignity, gender equality, physical and mental integrity,

Taking into account that protection from violence against women and domestic violence is an integral obligation of the state authorities, which are liable and competent to interfere in the private and family relationships with the task to investigate and disclose such acts of violence in order to ensure the effective protection of victims,

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ADOPTED THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Republic of Bulgaria to sign and ratify The Convention of the Council of Europe on Prevention and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as The Istanbul Convention

2. To take measures at institutional level to improve the coordination and cooperation between institutions, involved in the prevention and elimination of violence against women, taking subsequent measures to reimburse and reintegrate the victims as well as re-educate the violators;

3. To finalize the establishment and adoption of National coordinative mechanism for cooperation between institutions, assistance and support to the victims of domestic violence;

4. To initiate the issuance of an Interpretative Decision to unify the contradictory court practice under the Domestic Violence Law and the related issues;

5. To conduct further research and collect data on the actual extent and causes of violence against women and domestic violence and the measures taken in relation to this phenomenon;

6. To implement and include Services specified in the Istanbul Convention for women who have suffered violence, to the amendment of the Bulgarian Law;

7. The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior to conduct regular trainings to advance preparation and qualification of judges, prosecutors, police officers, and other people, involved in this issue;

8. To make specific proposals to the organizations and institutions involved for joint actions for prevention of violence within the variable educational institutions in the form of seminars, lectures, pamphlets, media appearances, etc. in order to reveal all forms of violence, the signs to identify it, victims' rights, the institutions in charge to help when needed and the way of defense;

9. Media to reflect truly cases of violence against women in order to form active public opinion of intolerance towards such deeds as well as to alter the existing stereotypes of gender relationships and establish equality among men and women;

10. To develop measures and programs to provide psychological, legal and economic support to the victims of violence;

11. To increase the participation of NGOs as a subject of policies on violence against women and domestic violence together with all stakeholders and bodies involved, institutions and persons – Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Interior, Social Assistance Agency, State Agency for Child Protection, courts, prosecutors, municipalities etc.;

12. To adopt Equal Possibility Act, ensuring equal participation of both genders in the social, economic and political life;

13. To introduce appropriate trainings in the educational institutions in Bulgaria for encouraging family relationships based on respect, mutual support and empathy;

14. To synchronize the Bulgarian legislation with the EU regulations in the field of violence against women and domestic violence;

Based on the above, and in view of the fact that one of the main objectives of the Istanbul Convention, currently non-signed and non-ratified by the Republic of Bulgaria, is to create an overall framework, policies and measures for the protection and assistance to all victims of violence against women and domestic violence,

W E H E R E B Y R E C O M M E N D :

To approach the competent body authorities of the Republic of Bulgaria to sign and ratify the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, effective as of 01.08.2014 (The Istanbul Convention), constituting the European framework on the protection of women against violence.

CONFERENCE CHAIRPERSON /Elka Porominska, Atty/: