

**STATEMENT**  
**by Mme Vasso Kollia**  
**Secretary-General for Gender Equality**  
**at the Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting**  
*Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls for*  
*sustainable development in the ECE region*  
ITEM 7  
“Preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls”  
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Dear Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the last years progress has been clearly made on gender equality, and in some cases, in a relatively short time. The Beijing Platform for Action and the diligent efforts of a multitude of actors at a national, regional and global level have immensely contributed to this result.

Last month, at the conference of the Italian Presidency of the EU Council, three issues were selected as key priorities for the Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament. Violence against women and girls was one of the three issues.

Indeed, women and girls continue falling victims of an undeclared war. Violence against women and girls is a brutal confrontation of power based on gender with no moral justification. It cannot be justified, either by traditions or by customs.

The issue deserves worldwide attention, for various reasons, but I will focus on three of them.

**Firstly, it is the size of the problem.** In many regions of the world, countless women everyday experience gender based violence by partners and non-partners alike. They become anonymous victims of sexual abuse in areas of armed conflict, too.

A recent survey uncovered shocking levels of violence against women across the EU a good part of which remains unreported due to fear. One in three women in the European Union, which equals to 62 million, has experienced at some point some type of gender based violence. We are concerned about the new types of violence against women and girls which have become possible within the digital universe.

**A second reason we should focus on gender based violence is related to its dramatic impact onto people,** starting with the victims; it

causes misery and suffering to their families; it perpetuates hatred affecting even whole communities, undermining any hope for growth.

Instead, multiple studies have shown that healthy and educated women are more likely to have healthier and more educated children, creating a positive, virtuous cycle for our societies.

There is strong evidence of a clear correlation between a country's gender gap and its national competitiveness.

**A third reason which should look closely onto violence against women is the scale of tolerance surrounding the problem.** There is a widespread lack of accountability and a persisting impunity of perpetrators of gender based crimes.

**How can we take one more step towards the solution of the problem?**

**Governments** have an important role to play in creating policies that protect women against gender based violence. The "Violence Against Women mainstreaming" ("VAW mainstreaming") has to become inherent part of the process of designing, implementing and monitoring policies on crime, economy, and gender equality.

Establishing the necessary legal frame to tackle the problem and enforcing the law are absolutely necessary but alone cannot solve the problem.

**Prevention of violence is vital.** It is absolutely necessary to systematically combat the derogatory stereotypes which present as "natural" duty of woman the suffering of discomfort and humiliation.

Sexism and devaluation of women are evident today in everyday life in all societies.

They are evident in the language of advertising; in the upbringing of children; in the marketing strategies of toy and publishing industries who discriminate between toys and books "for girls" and "for boys". Sexism is also evident in the school playground, and in the classroom, too, with the implicit –and some times explicit- encouragement of students to opt for "girls" and "boys" subjects and later careers. Last, but not least, devaluation of women is obvious in any kind of fundamentalism that maintains a phobic and vindictive attitude towards women and girls.

It is **civil society, educators and media** that are also critical in developing a culture of respect for humanitarian values and universal human rights, regardless of gender.

The **new web-based media** may support this endeavour. Almost everyday the global public opinion becomes witness of gender based atrocities against women in various regions of the world, and particularly in areas of armed conflict. We have many examples where digital

communities have acted as a positive force in pushing governments to take more effective measures against gender based violence and crime.

**The prevention and combating of violence against women is an issue of high priority for us in Greece.** A nation-wide network of structures and frontline services is already completed, The network includes Counselling Centres, shelters for women victims of violence and a dedicated SOS telephone helpline.

In our endeavour to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence, it is of utmost importance to seek allies among **men and boys**. It is men and boys that have to explain that violence against women and girls is not a sign of 'manhood' but an expression of anti-social human instincts leading our societies back to barbarism. Men and boys can offer positive role models combating negatives stereotypes in public and private life.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We could probably agree that gender based violence will not be eliminated unless the position of women in social, economic and political life becomes strengthened.

Despite the improvement in gender equality, no country in the world has fully closed the gender gap. Global reports depict a persisting gender gap considering indicators such as health and survival, education, participation in the economy and political empowerment.

According to the *Global Gender Gap Report 2014*, the gender gap is narrowest concerning **health and survival** and secondly **educational attainment**. ON the contrary, all countries persistently lag behind concerning **economic participation and political empowerment of women**.

**What is the grand picture taking shape here?**

Our societies offer women health and education but they are not as willing to allow them access to high power and authority areas.

**An open secret comes to surface, but this time illustrated by figures.** Women are treated as human beings but not at equal par with men.

Our societies pay too high a “maintenance cost” for a part of their population, actually half of it, which they persist to consider supportive!

But there is a tangible opportunity cost, too, which corresponds to impressive portions of Gross Domestic Product around the globe. And an indicative example of "opportunity cost"; if women in Europe did have a share in the digital economy at par with men, the European GDP would increase by 9 billion Euros, that is, a figure equal to Malta’s GNP.

In this sense, we are fully aligned with the UN WOMEN Report on "The Global Economic Crisis and Gender Equality" urging states to prioritize

gender equality in social and economic policies to prevent global economic crises.

Reserving auxiliary roles for women, and gender based violence, are two sides of the same coin. Neither works well while both put our societies' future in jeopardy.

Let us see the momentum of the socio-economic crisis as a historic window of opportunity to transform our societies.

Because the cost of gender inequality has become unbearable for our world.

Thank you.