Speech at an event on gender-based violence

*EIGE’s Director Carlien Scheele delivered this speech at an event on gender-based violence organised by the Venice Office of the Council of Europe on 25 November 2021.*

Good morning,

It is good to be here today on the first day of the 2021 Orange the World campaign, launching the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence.

As you may know, I was working at the Council of Europe before I took up my role as Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality, so I know first-hand of how committed my former colleagues are to eradicating violence against women.

One of the times this was most clear, was when the Istanbul Convention opened for signature. I remember the joy and excitement my colleagues felt, together with the many activists, member state representatives and professionals we had been working with to achieve this goal.

This marked a breaking point, where, after many years of struggle, we could finally place our hopes in a legally binding and far-reaching tool to combat violence against women.

We all recognised how significant this moment was for women and girls experiencing gender-based violence. We finally had detailed guidance on how to create a holistic system that would fully protect victims and bring us one step closer to ending their pain and suffering.

We could never have predicted the challenges we would face.
First, we could not have predicted that we would be fighting two pandemics at once: Covid-19 and violence against women. We could not know that Covid-19 would trap women with their abusers, making it difficult for them to seek help and to escape.

We also could never have predicted that myths, misunderstandings and disinformation about the concept of gender would spread so quickly, prompting some countries to revoke this groundbreaking treaty.

But even in these challenging times, the power of the Istanbul Convention is unquestionable.

The Convention has loyal allies. Eradicating violence against women is one of the top priorities of the European Union. Right now, the European Commission is drafting new legislation to tackle violence against women across the whole of the EU.

The European Institute for Gender Equality also prides itself on being a strong ally of the Council of Europe.

In our work on gender-based violence, we focus especially on intimate partner violence, and its most severe form: femicide. We share the Council of Europe’s belief there can be no equality until women and girls are safe in their own homes.

To help EU Member States properly measure intimate partner violence, we have developed 13 indicators to capture the different forms this violence takes. From rape, to psychological abuse, to femicide, our indicators can help EU countries see the real picture when they collect their data.

On femicide specifically, we have just released a package to help correctly identify such killings, from murders at the hands of intimate partners, to deaths as a result of unsafe abortions.

Of course, violence against women is about more than solid data. Next year we will be releasing an analysis of how countries try to give justice to the victims of femicide, and highlighting where they need to be doing more.
We also look beyond the police and justice sector in our work. We have carried out interviews with witnesses of intimate partner violence and with professionals working with victims, to understand what makes people take action, and what stops them. This is critical if we want to create a zero tolerance culture to gender-based violence.

We also respond to ongoing events, and recently published an in-depth analysis of how EU Member States responded to spikes in domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Right now, we are looking at how violence against women is being replicated online, with an analysis of the different ways EU countries are dealing with cyber violence.

Cyber violence is yet another example of how we cannot predict the future. Despite creating the most comprehensive document we have on combatting violence against women, the drafters of the Istanbul Convention could not anticipate the different ways abusers would use the online sphere to harass and threaten women.

This shows how important it is to create a society where violence against women is not tolerated – not tolerated by neighbours, by the police, or by the justice system.

None of us are fortune tellers, and we cannot predict everything that will happen in our laws, so we need to erase violence from our culture – from schools, from workplaces and from our media.

Thank you for working with us to achieve this important goal.

**Metadata**

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