

OPENING ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY MARIE-LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA, PRESIDENT OF MALTA DURING THE 2014 ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN NETWORK ON GENDER AND VIOLENCE.

Date: MONDAY, 21 APRIL 2014

Time: 4.30pm

Venue: UNIVERSITY CAMPUS, VALLETTA

Gender, Violence and Prevention

Honorary Minister, eminent members of the academia, distinguished guests;

I extend a warm welcome to you all, especially to those of you who have travelled to our beautiful island to participate in this conference.

It is with pride that today I inaugurate this Public Seminar and Conference to discuss gender, violence and prevention.

The prevention of any sort of violence should be on the agenda of every country, every government and policy maker, every researcher, and indeed, every one of us.

When the violence is between genders, the issue becomes more intimate, requiring even more collaboration between stakeholders from all of society.

Gender violence constitutes a breach of the fundamental right to life, liberty, security, and dignity, equality between women and men, non-discrimination and physical and mental integrity.

Domestic violence is one of the biggest threats to men, women and children, as well as to their health and well-being.

Globally, approximately 1 in 3 women will experience violence during her lifetime, often at the hands of an intimate partner.

The existing constraints halt progress in addressing gender violence and need to be tackled, if we are to prevent it.

The constraints include:

- not enough priority being given to gender violence
- treating violence against women and children as a one-time occurrence
- lack of resources

- dismissing domestic violence as a culturally-rooted problem, that is either too complex, or not severe enough, to warrant urgent attention.

And the fact that gender violence takes place behind closed doors, has furthered inaction in the name of privacy.

If we are to take the prevention of gender violence seriously and empower victims of violence, we need to open the doors wide open.

Opening doors to men involved in eliminating violence against women; they will effectively make a big difference in changing mentality, culture and attitudes.

I am proud to state that Malta is signatory to the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

This is the first legally-binding instrument in Europe in this field, and in terms of scope, it is the most far reaching international instrument to address this serious violation of human rights.

It aims at zero tolerance for violence against women and is a major step forward in making Europe a safer place and a Europe free from gender-based violence.

I encourage more countries to open their doors to the Istanbul Convention, which also emphasises the importance of collecting data on domestic violence, so that each country may construct a clear picture of the extent of the problem.

Malta still needs to put forward amendments in the Laws, such as the Domestic Violence Act, in order to ratify the Convention.

As President of Malta, I earnestly await the moment when I will give the seal of approval to any laws, or amendments to existing laws, that will make the prevention of gender violence a reality.

Europe also needs to open its doors to a more thorough evidence-based approach to violence by championing more research on the issue.

Only when we are all ready to make this commitment towards the prevention of gender violence, can men, women and children achieve their full potential in a just and fair society for all.

I augur a fruitful conference to you all.

And to our visitors, I hope you will find some time to explore our beautiful islands, and if not, you are most welcome to visit us once again.