

## **European Commission's Panel "A year of focused actions to combat violence against women and girls"**

**When: Wednesday, 15 March 2017, 13.15-14.30**

**Venue: UN Headquarters, Conference Room 2**

**Ana Sofia Fernandes, EWL Portuguese Board Member, Secretary-General of the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights**

The European Women's Lobby has been particularly vocal on the topic of violence against women. What would you describe is the role of the Lobby and how do you work together with other actors to improve the response from the European Institutions and the EU Member States?

Good afternoon,

It is a pleasure and an honour to address you today, as European Women's Lobby (EWL) Portuguese Board Member, my organisation being the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights. EWL is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU), working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. EWL membership extends to organisations in all 28 EU Member States and three of the candidate countries, as well as to 20 European-wide organisations, representing a total of more than 2000 associations.

EWL has been working to combat male VAW for 20 years through its Observatory on VAW which brings together experts and frontline activists from across the 28 EU Member States and beyond.

The EWL Observatory is a unique body in Europe and it plays a key role in identifying burning issues and monitoring progress towards a Europe free from male violence against women. It enables knowledge and information sharing; bridging with regional initiatives; developing common tools; stimulating the reflection and mobilising members for action.

Some of the examples of our work throughout the years include:

- In 2013: the project "Act against rape! Use the Istanbul Convention!", which aimed at raising awareness on the provisions

of the Istanbul Convention regarding rape and to promote the Convention as a concrete tool for change to eradicate all forms of male violence against women and specifically rape; the project was based on our EWL Barometer on Rape in the EU, which showed that Member States legislations are still not equipped to protect women from rape;

- The “EWL Campaign: Together for a Europe free from prostitution”, bringing together more than 250 organisations from all over Europe, with which we supported the 2014 European Parliament Resolution promoting the Nordic Model on the abolition of prostitution.

Violence against women and girls continues to be the most pervasive violation of women’s human rights in Europe and worldwide, and affects the lives of millions of women and girls. It is still a major concern in the EU, and there has been inadequate action by the EU and by Member States to address it.

Just a few data for us all to remember:

- In Europe, 50 women die every week from male domestic violence;
- 95% of all acts of violence taking place within the home are against women;
- One in three women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15;
- Every second a woman is confronted with one or more forms of sexual harassment;
- 75 % of women in top management positions have experienced sexual harassment at work.

How much more evidence do we need before decision makers take action? How many more women should be beaten, raped, killed, prostituted, harassed, psychologically abused, before Europe finds it unacceptable?

Violence against all women and girls is a political issue: when some countries don’t take up their responsibility to ensure safety and integrity of all women and girls, it means that they deliberately want to build societies

where women's rights are not respected, where women and girls are considered inferior and their bodily integrity is not protected.

That is why we have formed a coalition of more than 25 organisations across civil society to demand the EU ratification of the Istanbul Convention. This European Coalition issued a statement called "Violence against women and girls: Will Europe rise up?", for the International Women's Day, and calls for consistent and comprehensive action NOW.

We welcome the EU commitments of the last few months:

- the Malta Joint Statement of last February - a landmark initiative where three European Institutions (European Parliament, European Commission and the Council Presidency) have jointly made a strong call for action to the Member States, asking them to ratify and fully implement the Istanbul Convention, and to approve the EU's accession to this Convention in a meaningful way;
- the European Commission declaration of 2017 as the European Year of focused action to combat violence against women and girls.

Our aim this year is to call the European Union to take concrete action against violence against women and, concretely, we are calling the EU decision makers and Member states to accelerate the negotiations to ensure the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention in the broadest possible way. Furthermore, we are disseminating an online petition developed, in partnership with WeMove.EU and available in six languages, to put additional pressure on EU decision makers.

The signature of the Istanbul Convention by the EU will serve to promote increased coordination policies across EU institutions and to ensure a coherent approach between the EU internal policies and its external policies on the promotion of the fight against violence against women and girls. It will allow us to fully meet the standards of Women's Human Rights as stated, namely, in the CEDAW Convention and its general recommendations on violence against women, in the Beijing Platform for Action and in the Sustainable Development Goals, namely target 5.2 "Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public

and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”.

Violence against women is a political issue. It is a European issue. It is time the EU does politics and takes responsibility, if we want to achieve the Agenda 2030.

We not only want women to be empowered, we also want all women to be free from violence and male dominance.