



**Trade Unions Say:  
NO COMPROMISE on WOMEN'S RIGHTS  
ZERO TOLERANCE for VIOLENCE against Women and Girls**

In the UN *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, violence against women is recognised as a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position in relation to men.

Violence against women exists in all countries and in all societies, and affects all groups of women and girls. One out of every three girls born today will face some form of violence in her life time. Violence against women and girls can be physical, sexual, psychological or economic. This shapes the reality of millions of women and girls who have no voice, no freedom, no economic independence and no equal access to education or work. Violence against women and girls happens in private and public places, and in physical as well as virtual online spaces. Violence against women and the threat of it deprives women of their basic human rights.

Extreme forms of violence against women - which should be punished under criminal law in every single country - include:

- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Forced marriage of young women and girls
- Rape, including rape as a weapon of war and ethnic cleansing

Domestic violence is the most widespread form of violence against women. Domestic violence is the main cause of female homicides worldwide (UN Office on Drugs and Crime). In Europe alone, 3,500 women are murdered by their intimate partners every year. Those figures are growing in several EU countries including Spain, Italy and the UK. A 2004 national study on femicide in South Africa estimated that a woman is killed by her intimate partner every six hours. In Latin America and in Canada, between 60 and 70% of all female homicides are perpetrated by an intimate partner.

Violence against women and girls is a significant threat to women's economic independence and deeply affects women's capacity to find and keep a job as well as their performance at work. As acknowledged in the Beijing Platform of Action: "Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence

against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.” (par. 112).

Along with the physical and emotional suffering, the economic costs of violence against women are considerable and can amount to billions of dollars a year due to medical and health care services or loss of productivity.

Violence against women and girls in schools and other educational settings, including those in remote rural areas, hinders students’ educational, psychological and social development. Students who experience bullying, sexual harassment and other forms of violence at school are more likely to be socially isolated, depressed, frustrated and have low attachment to school. When violence occurs in educational settings it obstructs teaching, taints the working environment of teachers and affects students’ quality of learning. Men and boys should be included in work on preventing violence particularly in educational settings. Progressive understandings of masculinities are critical in this work with men and boys, especially as they are often expressed and acted out among and between peer groups in educational settings

Violence against women and girls, or the threat of it, increases their risk of HIV infection: women who experience violence are three times more likely to be infected with HIV than those who have not (UNAIDS, 2010). Subordination in marriages and intimate relationships greatly diminishes women’s ability to negotiate condom use for safer sex, or to refuse unsafe sex.

Currently a number of politically conservative and fundamentalist religious forces from all denominations seek to limit gender equality or the realisation of women’s rights for ‘cultural’, ‘traditional’ or ‘religious’ reasons. This form of culturally-justified violence against women and girls (CVAW) relies on claims of cultural or religious authenticity and authority, and leads to the curtailment of women’s fundamental right to control their own bodies and make their own life choices. Such claims must be rejected outright: there is no cultural or religious right to threaten, control, dominate, harm, torture or kill a woman because of her gender ([www.violenceisnotourculture.org](http://www.violenceisnotourculture.org)).

### **Violence in the Workplace**

Violence against women in the workplace, whether sexual, physical, mental, psychological or economic, is a widespread phenomenon that affects millions of women, and impacts on certain groups of vulnerable women disproportionately:

- Women working in sectors that are not covered by labour laws – such as domestic workers, especially migrant domestic workers, who often find themselves at the mercy of their employers because of inadequate labour legislation;
- Women working in export processing zones where workers’ rights are limited;
- Women working in areas of conflict or in countries in which male perpetrators of violence against women act with impunity;
- Young women in precarious work situations, who are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence

The continued segregation of women in precarious, low-paid and low status jobs and positions, contributes to the problem. The current global crisis makes it even more difficult for women to find decent work. Privatization, structural readjustment and various “austerity” measures have entailed the loss of important public services and public service jobs. In many countries, these were “good” unionized jobs for women, with decent pay, benefits and pensions. Since there is a high concentration of women in public sector jobs, women are disproportionately affected and they are doubly affected: due to their dependency on public services. The crisis, which is also being used as an excuse to scale back human and workers’ rights and cut down jobs, weakens women’s legal protections at work. Women are afraid to lose their source of income and are increasingly reluctant to denounce acts of violence at their workplace. This further perpetuates intolerable situations of violence at work. In addition, the overall cuts in public spending have negative impacts on the effectiveness of prevention measures and social services provided to victims of violence.

The realisation of women’s universal human rights, their empowerment and their promotion to leadership positions are all crucial elements of an agenda to eliminate violence against women and girls. The respect and promotion of women’s civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights are essential conditions to ensure women’s autonomy and capacity to exit violent situations. Access to health care and social services, child care, education, housing, food and basic income security are inextricably linked to women’s greater or lesser vulnerability to different manifestations of violence against women.

### **Trade Unions in Action**

Together with other civil society partners, trade unions develop, implement and promote strategies aimed at eliminating violence against women and girls.

The elimination of violence requires strong intervention from public authorities in order to design and implement appropriate prevention measures, to ensure legal protection and the prosecution of cases, and to provide support and compensation for victims. However, civil society organisations have a strong role to play in the design and implementation of public actions aimed at eliminating violence against women and girls. As trade unions, we call on states to adequately fund and invest in quality public services, which are accessible to women, particularly women who are victims of violence.

Trade unions:

- Identify and address the underlying inequalities and the abuse of power that leads to discrimination and violence
- Raise awareness on and mobilize against discrimination and violence
- Break the silence around violence at the workplace
- Make the prevention and elimination of acts of violence a topic of social dialogue
- Include measures to protect victims of domestic violence in collective agreements

- Help to create mechanisms to eliminate sexual harassment and other forms of violence at the workplace
- Lobby for legislative reform that will help prevent and remedy violence against women, ensure compliance with the social and economic rights and promote decent work

### **15 Demands to the Member States**

1. Ensure gender equality is enshrined as a principle in national constitutions.
2. Put in place effective mechanisms to enforce the law in close cooperation with civil society. Ensure effective legal sanctions that will discourage acts of violence.
3. Adopt comprehensive Plans of Action against violence against women, and provide sufficient resources for policy to be implemented and to provide adequately funded and accessible public services to help women who are victims of violence (shelters, hotlines, housing, social services, child care, etc.)
4. Provide training to judicial authorities and the police to enable them to deal adequately with issues of violence against women and girls.
5. Facilitate women's access to the mechanisms of justice, including the provision of translation into different languages as required, free legal assistance and advocacy.
6. Take effective measures to ensure that the media respect and promote respect for women and girls.
7. Integrate the principle of gender equality into school curricula, including a focus on the prevention of violence.
8. Actively support women in leadership positions and work towards achieving parity between men and women in all decision-making bodies.
9. Enact national legislation that recognises gender-based violence as grounds for asylum and non-repatriation claims, and that recognizes the specific vulnerabilities of certain groups of women, including migrant workers, women with disabilities and indigenous women.
10. Develop indicators on work-related violence, to regularly compile and publish sex-disaggregated data and set up systems to measure and monitor progress toward agreed targets.
11. Enact effective legislation to protect women and girls against discrimination and violence.
12. Ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW - 1999) without reservation and implement its General Recommendation No19 on violence against women as well its Optional Protocol to the CEDAW;
  - States which have ratified CEDAW with reservations should withdraw those reservations with immediate effect;
  - States that have ratified CEDAW without reservation but continually violate CEDAW should be held accountable for such violations
  - All States should closely monitor and evaluate the implementation of CEDAW.

13. Ratify the Fourth World Conference for Women Platform for Action objectives and actions on violence against women and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) as well the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, the Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance;
14. Ratify ILO Convention 111 on non-discrimination, No 189 on domestic workers, No 182 on child labour and implement ILO Recommendation No. 200 on HIV-AIDS;
15. Adopt and adhere to the international instruments that protect women's rights in armed conflicts: OHCHR Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974); Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995); UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000); Statement by the International Committee of the Red Cross to the UN General Assembly, 14 October 2009.

To demonstrate their commitment to addressing violence against women, governments, in cooperation with civil society, must intensify action to eliminate gender-based discrimination from all spheres and achieve true equality between women and men.

**TRADE UNIONS call on all member states to take all necessary measures to immediately and without further delay prevent and remedy violence against women and girls**