



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives**

### **Statement submitted by Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfi, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## Statement

### **The journalists' and writers' foundation women's platform**

Domestic violence, a violation of fundamental human rights, is one of the major social problems facing societies all around the world. Regrettably, although the family is the most important institution, considered as the safest place, and family ties are valued, domestic violence continues to be prevalent across society, haunting the minds of policymakers despite all political and judicial measures. A recent study entitled "Violence against Women in Turkey" has collected the results of the first nationally representative survey, constituting the most recent official statistics on this topic in Turkey. According to the study, 39 per cent of Turkish women have been subjected to physical violence either from their husbands or ex-husbands. One out of 10 women in Turkey was beaten by their husbands during pregnancy. Notably, not only uneducated women but also highly educated and professional women face violence in Turkey. Three out of 10 women have faced sexual as well as physical violence. The even more vexing reality is that 49 per cent of these women do not reveal the violence they endure, let alone seek help from any organization.

Although, the issue of domestic violence against women entered the political agenda in the late 1980s through civil society, and the women's movement in particular, Turkey has not been successful at combating violence against women. We still very frequently see news reports of women beaten, injured, or even killed by their husbands and other male relatives in the street, at home or at work.

It is important to state that many official and civil society organizations have taken initiatives to fight violence. It is a positive development that measures against violence are becoming State policy. For example, the Law for the Protection of Family, Law No. 4320, came into effect in 1998 and was amended in 2007. Usually interpreted as a historic milestone in the struggle against domestic violence, this law enabled Family Court judges to take measures for the protection of individuals exposed to domestic violence. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Justice published circulars and various training programmes to implement this law as an effective policy to eliminate violence. Also, the General Directorate on the Status of Women, founded in 1990, was restructured to become the coordinating agency in the prevention of violence against women and traditional custom/honour killings. Operating under the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, the agency works to encourage legislation, and organizes campaigns, meetings, conferences and seminars in cooperation with relevant public institutions, universities, local administrations, non-governmental organizations and the media. As an important State initiative, the General Directorate on the Status of Women has worked on the official project called "National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence against Women". It is important to note that one of the most important initiatives of governmental reform was educating the masses to raise social awareness of and sensitivity to matters of domestic violence. It is in this connection that in-service training programmes for public sector professionals (e.g., health personnel, police officers, law enforcement officers, judicial bodies, etc.) were established. These training programmes were extended even to the recruits fulfilling their military service obligation.

Within the framework of Turkey's bid to join the European Union, significant regulations and changes have been made to the Civil Code (2001) and Penal Code

(2004). In 2004, Turkey took important steps towards eliminating problematic laws in the Penal Code. The amendments brought progressive definitions of and higher sentences for sexual crimes, criminalized marital rape, introduced measures to prevent sentence reductions granted to perpetrators of honour killings, eliminated previously existing discrimination against women who were not virgins and unmarried, criminalized sexual harassment at the workplace and considered sexual assaults by security forces to be aggravated offences. Even more important, provisions legitimizing outdated, rare practices, such as cases of rape and abduction where the perpetrator marries the victim, have been abolished.

In addition to some of the above-mentioned legislative and official initiatives, civil society organizations, including women's movements and the media, deserve credit for keeping the issue on the agenda as well as preparing campaigns geared towards raising awareness and challenging the long-ingrained tacit social acceptance of violence against women. Just one example is the famous "Stop domestic violence" campaign carried out jointly by leading newspapers and television channels under which several activities were organized, including national and international meetings and training programmes, to seek ways to eliminate violence and raise awareness.

It is important to note that action plans and legislative measures can only become relevant once an action is defined as violence and, concomitantly, a crime. In this vein, cultural norms that set the background for the social acceptance of domestic violence have to be challenged. Turkey has a traditionally patriarchal society. While violence against the weak, marginalized or unprotected is shunned, the domestic life of families is kept strictly private. As part of this notion, behaviour that may qualify as domestic violence or abuse is considered part of the traditional gender roles of family life. Therefore, the most important issue is to raise awareness among all strata of society about what domestic violence is and its detrimental effects on future generations. Legislative or other structural measures can be successful once a common understanding of domestic violence has been reached.

A forceful conversation should be established that challenges the cultural beliefs that women should make sacrifices to keep marriages together despite difficult circumstances. That enduring violence is not a virtue that women should seek to practise despite unbearable circumstances should be proclaimed and spread across society.

Another dimension concerns children. For the most part; women are encouraged to put up with violence for the sake of the children. However, living in an atmosphere where violence is frequent may not serve the best interest of children; moreover, it might even have a negative impact on the children's physical and psychological health, as well as on their success in school. All parents should provide a peaceful environment in which their children can live. Therefore, the discourse concerning protecting children from violence should be maintained, strongly supported and widely broadcast by policymakers and media channels.

All in all, the cultural belief that whatever goes on in the family is a private issue that should not be made public, let alone reported to the police, should be renounced. Women who experienced domestic violence and abuse or who might be at risk should be taught that violence within the family is not acceptable and that they have legal rights protecting them. Violence is a violation of the bodily integrity of an individual; everyone has personal autonomy and self-determination over their

own bodies, and a violation of this principle is an unethical infringement, therefore a crime. This fact should be emphasized strongly and spread widely across society. This awareness can only be translated into action where there is trust in governmental and non-governmental institutions and a commitment to the socioeconomic development of women.

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