Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1860 (2012)[1]
Final version

Advancing women's rights worldwide

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Despite the numerous commitments made by States in recent decades to promote gender equality and advance women's rights, progress in improving the status of women on a global scale has fallen short of expectations. The Parliamentary Assembly calls for a renewed impetus to be given to the protection, promotion and effective implementation of women's rights worldwide, as well as their periodic evaluation. The Assembly underlines that the separation of religion and State is necessary for the realisation of equality and non-discrimination, both *de jure* and *de facto*.

2. Even if 187 of the 193 United Nations member States have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 42 have made reservations to one or more articles, a considerable proportion of which contradict the spirit of the convention. In addition, only 103 States have ratified the Optional Protocol, which recognises the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to receive complaints from individuals or groups. The effective implementation of the convention itself remains unsatisfactory.

3. The full achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women and Goal 5 on improving maternal health, appears unlikely by 2015, contrary to what was agreed at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, the Beijing Conference in 1995 and the Cairo Conference in 1994.

4. The Assembly regrets the widespread and systematic discrimination against women and is concerned that inequalities might deepen even more as a result of the measures taken by States to counter the economic and financial crisis. It considers it important to concentrate efforts in certain areas, as lack of progress in them prevents women from enjoying other rights.

5. More than two thirds of the world's poor are women, which leads to secondary discrimination in access to health care, education and property.

6. Worldwide, violence affects women disproportionately, with one in three women being beaten, coerced into sex or abused in other ways in their lifetime. Some 603 million women and girls live in countries where there is no specific legal protection from domestic violence; more than one in 10 have suffered sexual violence involving the use of force, often in the context of armed conflicts; 80% of people trafficked are women and children.

7. Some 358 000 women die annually due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth and worldwide around 14 million girls aged between 15 and 19 give birth each year.

8. Furthermore, one in three women cannot read or write, in a world where literacy is an essential key to empowerment. Only 19% of parliamentarians worldwide are women, which weakens the importance of gender equality issues on national agendas and governments' political accountability in this area.

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1. Assembly debate on 26 January 2012 (8th Sitting) (see Doc. 12812, report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Err). Text adopted by the Assembly on 26 January 2012 (8th Sitting).

9. Against this state of affairs, the Assembly welcomes the establishment of "UN Women", in 2010, and strongly supports its activities, hoping that this agency will be able to create a new momentum for the advancement of women's rights worldwide by giving them more political weight and visibility. The Assembly also welcomes the establishment of UN Women national committees.

10. In view of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States to:

10.1. step up efforts to combat discrimination against women and to give more political weight to gender equality issues and women's rights;

10.2. encourage political decision makers to take into account the gender dimension in all policies and legislation through gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting;

10.3. create a system to estimate the economic costs for society of all the types of discrimination and violence experienced by women, as well as of failure to address maternal health needs, and support research on this topic; encourage gender- and age-specific data collection in these fields;

10.4. encourage research on the differentiated impact of the economic crisis on women and men and, on this basis, introduce appropriate measures to redress inequalities;

10.5. ensure that comprehensive reproductive health programmes receive adequate funding, and to lift limitations on access to reproductive health services both domestically and within development co-operation, within the limits of the law;

10.6. ensure balanced participation and representation of women in political life and political decision-making bodies. This can only be achieved if national constitutions allow for the possibility of positive action, if the number of political mandates is limited and if there is a strong political will on the part of political parties;

10.7. consider including the principle of gender equality in the system of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), through the elaboration of a new protocol;

10.8. sign, ratify and implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210);

10.9. if they have not already done so, ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

11. The Assembly also calls on the Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as States whose parliaments enjoy observer and partner for democracy status with the Assembly, to:

11.1. do their utmost to limit reservations to international human rights instruments, including the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

11.2. withdraw existing reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

11.3. intensify the application of the accountability mechanism in international treaties, considering that the failure of accountability reinforces gender-based inequality and may lead to human rights violations;

11.4. ensure that UN Women and its national committees and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) receive the resources needed to fulfil their objectives to increase the impact of women's voice, leadership and participation;

11.5. make additional efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women and Goal 5 on improving maternal health;

11.6. provide support to the United Nations to ensure the conduct of a global evaluation of the advancement of women's rights every ten years starting from 2015.

12. The Assembly calls on Council of Europe observer States and States whose parliaments enjoy observer and partner for democracy status with the Assembly to:

12.1. consider seeking accession to the Council of Europe instruments open to non-member States which would have an impact on enhancing the status of women and gender equality, including:

12.1.1. the European Convention on Nationality (ETS No. 166);

12.1.2. the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197);

12.1.3. the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201);

12.1.4. the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence;

12.2. become members of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and submit their laws on gender equality to it for review.

13. The Assembly calls on the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to develop and formalise the existing co-operation between the Council of Europe and UN Women through an exchange of letters between the two organisations.

14. The Assembly resolves to pursue its co-operation in this area with the European Union and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

15. The Assembly also wishes to strengthen its partnership with non-governmental organisations and parliamentary networks for the promotion and advancement of women's rights and encourages them to continue research on the situation of women's rights on a national, regional and international scale in order to establish trends on progress.

16. The Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member and observer States to increase effective technical and political dialogue between civil society organisations (CSOs) and the government by institutionalising spaces for joint decision making in countries where they do not exist and effectively using spaces already in existence.