Current situation in combating violence against women and any future actions

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Maria CARLSHAMRE (ALDE, SE) on the current situation in combating violence against women and any future actions. The report focused on men's violence against women in close relationships, citing studies showing that at least 30-35% of women between 16 and 67 had at one time been victims of physical or sexual violence and that 65-90 % of prostituted women had already been subjected to sexual abuse as children or later. It also pointed out that men's violence against women can affect women of any age, irrespective of education, income or social position. Such violence was a universal phenomenon linked to the unequal distribution of gender power which still prevailed.

The committee made a number of recommendations to the Commission and the Member States :

- men's violence towards women should be regarded as "a violation of human rights reflecting unequal gender power relations in our society" and there should be zero tolerance of such violence in any form;

- a harmonised methodology was needed as well as the appointment of national rapporteurs to gather information on such violence;

- funds should be earmarked for investigation into the costs of men's violence against women in the EU;

- marital sexual violence should be recognised as a crime and rape within marriage should be made a criminal offence;

- in their national laws, Member States should not accept any reference to cultural practice as an extenuating circumstance in cases of violence against women, crimes of honour and genital mutilation. Moreover, accomplices to a crime of honour, such as family members of the perpetrator who have encouraged or ordered the crime, should be prosecuted "in order to state firmly that such behaviour is unacceptable in society";

- a European conference should be organised to address the problem of honour crimes, "which has become a European problem with cross-border implications";

- female genital mutilation must be prevented and banned;

- Member States must ensure victims' right to safe access to justice and effective enforcement, including compensation;

- children who witness their mother being battered should be regarded as victims;

- all perpetrators of violence should receive professional help and treatment;

- proper training, "including a child's perspective", should be provided to police officers, judicial personnel, health workers, educators, etc.;

- lastly, the Commission was urged to establish a programme "Fight against violence" as a separate part of the general programme "Fundamental Rights and Justice" for 2007-2013 and to declare a European Year against men's violence against women, as repeatedly requested by Parliament.