Current situation in combating violence against women and any future actions

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drawn up by Maria **CARLSHAMRE** (ALDE, SE) on the current situation in combating violence against women and any future action. The resolution passed by 545 votes to 13 with 56 abstentions. Parliament pointed out that men's violence against women could affect women of any age, irrespective of education, income or social position. Studies in Sweden, Germany and Finland have shown that at least 30-35 % of women between 16 and 67 have at one time been victims of physical or sexual violence. If psychological violence is included, the proportion of women affected rises to between 45 and 50 %. Furthermore, the kind of violence affecting women is typically perpetrated by their close relatives or by partners. Parliament also pointed out that only a few Member States had gathered data relating to the prevalence of different forms of men's violence against women, making it difficult to understand the real extent of such violence on the one hand and to draw up an efficient response at EU level on the other. No detailed EU-level study has been carried out into the financial costs and social and human consequences of men's violence against women. It is vital to conduct such a study in order to highlight the phenomenon and combat this serious violation of human rights.

Parliament made several recommendations to the Commission and Member States, inter alia:

- to formulate a zero-tolerance policy as regards all forms of violence against women;

to adopt a framework for cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with a view to developing policies and practices to combat domestic violence;

- to establish harmonised methodology, definitions and criteria, in cooperation with Eurostat, the Fundamental Rights Agency, and the future European Gender Institute in order to gather comparable and compatible data throughout the EU concerning men's violence against women, in particular, comprehensive studies of prevalence;

- to appoint national rapporteurs in order to gather, exchange and process information and statistics on men's violence against women, including information on children growing up in violent environments, and to promote the exchange of best practice among Member States, accession and candidate countries;

- to develop programmes and surveys targeting women who are members of culturally specific communities or ethnic minority groups, with a view to obtaining an account of the specific forms of violence that these women encounter and planning appropriate methods of dealing with them;

- to recognise sexual violence within marriage as a crime and to make rape within marriage a criminal offence;

- not to accept any reference to cultural practices as a mitigating factor in cases of violence against women, crimes of honour or female genital mutilation;

- to exchange best practice with the countries with more experience of crimes of honour, and to encourage the prosecution of accomplices to crimes of honour, such as any family members of the perpetrator who

encouraged or ordered the crime of honour, in order to demonstrate firmly that such behaviour is unacceptable. The EU must address the problem of honour crimes, which has become an EU-wide problem with cross-border implications;

- to take account of the fact that children who witness their mothers being battered could be regarded as victims in terms of compensation claims;

- not to accept any references to intoxication by alcohol as a mitigating factor in cases of men's violence against women;

- to combat the idea that working as a prostitute can be equated with doing a job;

Member States must take appropriate measures to ensure better protection and support of victims and those who are at risk of becoming victims of violence against women by providing a wide variety of assistance and protection and adopting a proactive, preventive and penal strategy towards the perpetrators of violence against women in order to reduce recidivism.

Parliament called on the Member States to take appropriate measures to stop female genital mutilation. Banning female genital mutilation and prosecuting perpetrators must become a priority in all relevant EU policies and programmes. Such acts must be defined as an illegal act of violence against women, which constitutes a violation of their fundamental rights and a serious aggression against their physical integrity. Regardless of where or in which country this act occurs against EU citizens or residents, such acts will be illegal. Doctors who conduct genital mutilation of young women and girls should not only to be prosecuted but also to have their practising licence withdrawn. Parents should be held legally liable when acts of female genital mutilation occur on minors. Furthermore, Parliament called on the Member States to ensure that female genital mutilation is considered a reasonable argument for an asylum claim in order to protect the asylum seeker from inhuman treatment.

Finally, Parliament called on the Commission to establish a mechanism on the basis of which it would be possible to identify those Member States in which the situation of violence against women appears to be comparatively worse.