

EEA Statement on Violence against Women and Girls

June 2021

In May 2021, Europe marked the 10th anniversary of the signing of the so-called Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence.

The vast majority of people will support the Istanbul Convention's desire for a "Europe free from violence against women and domestic violence." Nevertheless, this document has also caused controversy across Europe. But the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA) does not want the core issues to be lost in all the argument.

Murder, rape, sexual harassment, forced marriage, forced abortion or sterilisation, coercive control, so-called "honour killings," degrading sexual and violent media content, all of these things mentioned in the Convention are undeniably wrong and can never be justified¹.

EEA calls upon its members to redouble our efforts to fight these evils. This is especially important at a time when the Covid-19 pandemic has provoked a surge in domestic violence and sexual exploitation of women and girls online.

EEA also calls upon wider society to take seriously the harm done to women and girls and the root causes of this harm. We would even argue that, in several ways, the Istanbul Convention does not go far enough.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Prostitution is exploitative and harmful. The vast majority of prostituted people are forced to do what they do, whether by traffickers, poverty, addiction or pressure from their partner or pimp. EEA longs to see every nation opposing prostitution, penalising the pimps and customers and helping the exploited to

exit the sex trade and rebuild their lives. The law should protect the dignity and worth of all human beings.

PORNOGRAPHY

EEA longs to see Europe acknowledging the levels of exploitation, degradation and cruelty in pornography and the way it distorts body image and healthy sexual relationships. All are impacted but the psychological and physical effects on girls and women are especially serious. We also want people to accept the link between the degrading media portrayal of women and sexual harassment in everyday life.

DOMESTIC ABUSE

In the UK, half of murdered women are killed by an intimate partnerⁱⁱ. How many women or children could be saved from trauma if there were properly funded domestic abuse support services to enable those in danger to escape? Issues of control, fear, threat and isolation can make it incredibly difficult for people to leave, extricating themselves emotionally, physically and financially from their abuser.

OUR PRIORITIES?

How much do our societies prioritise tackling violence and abuse against women and girls? What commitments are there in terms of legal remedies, finance, police training and procedures to ensure that incidents can be investigated fairly and sensitively? What commitments are there to ensure survivors are given long term support, and perpetrators are properly punished or restrained?

EEA calls upon Europe's Evangelicals to continue to pray, spot, speak up and intervene appropriately on these and other issues related to the well-being of women and girls.

COMBATTING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, INCLUDING PORNOGRAPHY

EEA's [European Freedom Network](#) unites 100s of Christian partners in working for freedom from human trafficking and sexual exploitation, including prostitution and pornography. It believes local church and individual Christians have a vital role to play in prayer, prevention, restoration, advocacy and practical action. EFN is developing a growing library of resources to support churches.

RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC ABUSE?

Local church has an important role in helping to spot abuse and to support women and men in abusive relationships, whether in the community, the mums & toddlers group or the congregation. The [Christian Network to End Domestic Abuse](#) (CNEDA) equips churches to understand what the Bible says about healthy relationships, how to prevent abuse and how to respond with care to abuse cases. The UK organisation [Restored](#) also provides excellent services. It would be wonderful to see CNEDA expand.

APPROPRIATE SAFEGUARDING TO STOP SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND OTHER ABUSE?

The vast majority of churches and Christian organisations ensure a safe and healthy atmosphere so that abuse is prevented and that any hint of a problem is dealt with appropriately. But one case is too many. We recommend that everyone ensures their safeguarding practice is strong, that alleged incidents are dealt with properly, and that all perpetrators are held accountable. No one should be above being challenged. The UK's [Christian Safeguarding Services](#) provide excellent resources.

EQUAL DIGNITY

Genesis 1:27 tells us that God made men and women in His image. Such a short verse has immense importance. It is at the heart of all human rights. Human beings have infinite value and dignity. That dignity is shared equally between girls and boys, women and men.

And that's why we do our utmost to stop violence against and abuse of girls and women.



Thomas Bucher
General Secretary
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ⁱ For more information about the scale and impact of these issues, as well as some biblical thinking on the matter, please refer to “The Oppression of Women: Violence – Exploitation – Poverty,” by Christine & Thomas Schirrmacher, as part of the Global Issues Series, which can be consulted here: <https://theology.worldidea.org/global-issues/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/homicideinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020>