

PRESS RELEASE

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: O.N.DA-WHO TASK FORCE IN ROME TODAY TO ENCOURAGE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS TO WORK TO PREVENT ABUSE

Thirty-five percent of women suffer physical or sexual violence worldwide, seven million in Italy alone. This has incalculable and permanent effects on the physical and mental health of women. These are the alarming figures of a social emergency that requires urgent practical responses from governments and national health systems.

Rome, 10 April 2014 – The main aims of the **expert committee on violence against women** were to present the **WHO Guidelines** and define **Italy's commitment to promoting the ratification of the Istanbul Convention** in other European countries. The National Observatory for Women's Health (**O.N.Da**) in association with **the World Health Organisation** sponsored the event held today in Rome, in the presence of **Italian and foreign MPs, clinical and women's associations**.

Violence against women is a growing and dramatic current phenomenon. It is a real medical emergency in Italy and the rest of the world. According to the recent WHO report, more than **one in three women worldwide are the victims of physical and/or sexual abuse**, often at the hands of their partners and 30% of acts of violence occur in the home.

The figures for Italy are also worrying. According to the latest estimates from statistics agency ISTAT, around seven million Italian women between 16 and 70 years old have suffered some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes - in 14.3% of cases at the hands of their partner - but only 7% of women reported him.

In 2011 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the **Istanbul Convention** against violence against women and domestic violence that, however, still needs to be ratified by two other EU member states to enter into effect.

The Italian ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the approval of Legislative Decree against femicide, which took place in 2013, are important actions taken by the Italian government to combat a phenomenon that constitutes a real social "disease", which has negative consequences on the physical and mental health of victims.

"The rapid ratification of the Istanbul Convention testifies, with unambiguous clarity, to a change of direction, a renewed perception of the need to act cohesively," said Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **Mario Giro**. *"Italy supports the inclusion of women's rights as a cornerstone of the new targets of the Millennium Development Goals post 2015, and supports the adoption of a UN resolution on forced marriages as a result of previous UN resolutions that ordered a report on the issue. The condemnation of all forms of violence against women and girls, as violations of the full enjoyment of human rights by the same, must be a certainty. Neither traditions nor customary uses, cultural practices, confidentiality, religion, so-called "honour" nor supposed unequal treatment justified by the diversity of roles may be invoked as a justification for violence or discrimination. The ultimate aim is to make discrimination and violence against women culturally and socially unacceptable. We are working*

together to encourage the promotion of the human rights of women and gender equality. We owe it to women and men, but especially to all victims, to the fallen and also to survivors of violence, now global in scope.”

*“In order to apply the law against femicide in our country, we need to continue to keep Italy’s institutions focused on this issue. The role of members of parliament in combating violence against women is strategic due to their contacts with local businesses and their ability to legislate,” said **Francesca Merzagora**, President of O.N.Da. “The expert committee today pursues the path of promotion of awareness on violence undertaken since last year alongside the WHO. The objectives of the meeting, made possible by Mediolanum Farmaceutici’s support for O.N.Da, include the circulation within Italy of the WHO Guidelines, aimed at helping countries improve how their health systems deal with cases of abuse, the presentation to British and Belgian parliamentarians of the work done in Italy to achieve the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the attempt to ensure that Italy takes a lead in promoting ratification in the other two EU member states, reflecting the commitment of our government to combating gender-based violence.”*

*“The data from the WHO World report on violence women are really worrying and show how the problem cuts across all women without distinction of age, origin, social status, or place,” said **Marleen Temmerman**, Director of the Department of Reproductive Health and Research at the World Health Organisation. “The data therefore require a reading that is not just limited to national borders, but that sees the various members of the international community engaged on a common front. Members of parliament can play a key role in this struggle towards a system of zero tolerance of violence against women. Thanks to their powers in the areas of law, accountability, promotion and budgeting they can ensure that national policies are suitable to fight and prevent this phenomenon. They can also make sure that countries adhere to international commitments such as the Istanbul Convention.”*

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