

# **Forced Marriages and Violence against Women in the Migrant Community**

## **The Istanbul Convention: A Model Treaty to Stop Violence against Women**

25 November 2013

Multimedia Room, VIC

### **Symposium Conclusions**

On 25 November 2013, the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) held an international Symposium on the issue of Forced Marriage and Violence Against Women in the Migrant Community. The symposium brought together high ranking diplomats, representatives from United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Officials from the the Council of Europe, the Austrian Parliament, the Austrian Ministry of Justice and the Austrian Federal Chancellery also participated in the Symposium. In addition, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, the Austrian Committee for UNICEF, the Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI), Renner Institute, Organization of Families of Asia-Pacific (OFAP), and the Vienna Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice participated in the Symposium. The meeting was opened by Barbara Prammer, President of Austrian Parliament, and Ambassador Gilka Melendez of the Dominican Republic, who spoke about the origin of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The symposium was addressed through a video message by the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

The panel discussions were chaired by Ambassador Dubravka Simonovic (Croatia), Ambassador Ayoob Erfani (Afghanistan), and Charlie Manangan, Deputy Chief of Mission (Phillipines). The Symposium also focused on the Human Rights Council Resolution on “Strengthening Efforts to Prevent and Eliminate Child, Early and Forced Marriage: Challenges, Achievements, Best Practices and Implementation Gaps” (A/HRC/RES/24/23), the General Assembly’s Resolution on “Taking Action Against Gender Related Killings of Women and Girls” (A/C.3/68/L.8) as well as the Agreed Conclusions of the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Participants at the symposium noted that child marriages and early marriages of girls are a manifestation of deep rooted discrimination against women and girls and a violation of their rights as well as an obstacle to the girl child’s full enjoyment of her rights. Furthermore, ending child marriages and forced marriages should go in parallel with addressing social norms and cultural factors such as traditional attitudes which place women in subordinate roles to men and which, act as a barrier to women and girls to freely choose whom they wish to marry.

Concern was expressed over UNICEF and UNFPA estimates on the global prevalence of child and early marriage. According to figures recently released by UNFPA, 142 million girls will become child brides between 2011 and 2020.

In relation to the 105 million international migrant women worldwide (UN DESA, 2009), some experience violence and discrimination at the beginning of the migration process, whilst en route, in transit and at their point of destination. Many of these women are subjected to domestic and stranger violence. Migrant women who experience violence are less likely to have access to basic and essential services, or may face discriminatory treatment if they do have access to services and are less likely to be able to hold perpetrators accountable.

The Symposium made the following recommendations to governments, UN agencies and entities and all relevant stakeholders:

#### Child and Forced Marriages:

- Conduct comprehensive and cultural contextual awareness raising involving all sectors of society including the media, parents, caregivers, religious leaders and community elders and those with specific responsibilities towards children on the harmful aspects of child and forced marriage;
- Promote equal education opportunities for girls including disaggregated data on access to education for girls;
- Enact and strictly enforce laws to ensure that marriage is entered into only with the free and full consent of the spouses and to raise the minimum legal age of consent and raise the minimum age for marriage where necessary;
- Establish adequate systems to provide support and assistance for victims to obtain medical, psychological, and other assistance;
- Provide effective remedies for those at risk of being forcefully married and for those who have already been forced to marry.

#### Violence against Migrant Women:

- Implement laws and policies that support migrant women rights and their integration into society, allowing them to live with dignity;
- Remove barriers that prevent migrant women from accessing basic and essential services;
- Legal machinery should strictly prosecute violations and crimes against migrant women without further re-victimizing them. These women should be provided with all the tools and opportunity to be self-sufficient and independent including:
  - Shelter, language lessons and social assistance, information on their rights, skills based training and employment opportunities, medical and psychosocial support and emergency assistance;

#### Ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention;

The significance of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (i.e. the Istanbul Convention) was highlighted. The Istanbul Convention requires states to exercise due diligence in order to prevent, investigate, punish, and provide reparation for women who are subjected to violence including migrant women irrespective

of their legal status. Currently, it requires only two more ratifications for it to come into effect. The treaty has a strong review mechanism. The members of the European Parliament have the possibility to point out deficiencies and lack of implementation of ratifying countries. The States Parties have agreed that culture, custom, religion, tradition, or so-called “honor” shall not be considered as justification for any acts of violence. The Istanbul Convention is the international “gold standard” in preventing and combating violence against women. It is open to all countries around the world. Civil society was urged to have their country ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention.

ACUNS Vienna Liaison

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