

Committee: Human Rights Council

Topic: Combating Violence against Women

Country: Spain

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states “everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, [or] sex ...”¹. Since its implementation in 1948, international organisations and governments have made great efforts to improve the global situation of Human Rights, but grave issues continue to limit people’s equality. In many parts of the world, being born a woman continues to imply a life-long sentence of inequality, a denial of basic Human Rights and a high risk of violence. The World Health Organisation estimates 1 in 3 women worldwide will experience some form of sexual or physical violence in their lifetime². So it is our duty, especially in today’s day and age, to eradicate all forms of violence against women and prevent it from claiming any more lives.

Spain believes all countries must empower women in every aspect of society in order to alleviate violence against women; which includes combating poverty, improving everyone’s access to education, and freeing women from the threat of violence³. However, Spain also recognises the inherent challenges associated with ending gender-based violence worldwide, as no country is immune to this issue.

Since the re-introduction of democracy in 1978, Spain has greatly developed its socio-political rights by ensuring women regained their right to vote, by providing safe access to healthcare and by promoting gender parity in education. Nonetheless, the HRC believes gender inequality and its implications continue to be a serious problem in Spain and they should be tackled with specific measures and policies. The main three issues that need to be addressed are domestic violence, socio-economic parity, and access to reproductive rights.

In 2007, the Spanish Government launched an extensive campaign and introduced the ‘016’ telephone helpline to tackle domestic violence against women. Since this problem claimed the lives of 865 women in Spain between 2009 and 2015⁴, it continues to be a priority specifically targeted by the Ministry of Equality. Nevertheless, domestic violence affects all socio-economic classes, so our Council recommends the imposition of tougher punishments (such as life imprisonment, rather than 15-year sentences) and providing more preventative measures (e.g. free self-defence lessons).

Spain has also improved its national stance on socio-economic parity by drafting measures such as the *Action Plan for Equal Opportunities for Women* and achieving 40% of female representation in its Parliament⁵. Despite the fact Spain’s gender pay gap is 19%, which is higher than the EU’s average of 16.1%⁶. Further improvements can be made through the adoption of targeted gender quotas aimed to improve female representation in traditional male-dominated spheres, as well as the introduction of harsher sanctions for those who do not respect gender parity laws.

In 1985, abortion was decriminalised in Spain, but it only remained legal under certain life-threatening conditions. Furthermore, since the Conservative government’s 2015 ratification of the Abortion Law, access to abortion continues to be challenged in Spain because women’s access to a safe and legal abortion has been limited⁷. The HRC recommends that all nation-members guarantee basic access to healthcare, where maternal and reproductive needs are met regardless of moral or religious biases; therefore avoiding clandestine and unsafe abortions where women’s lives are risked unnecessarily.

Internationally, UN members have addressed the issue of violence against women on a number of occasions. Like most democracies, Spain has made many cooperative efforts to eradicate this problem, such as adopting the 1979 *CEDAW Convention* and joining the 1993 *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*^{8, 9}. Nonetheless, until countries fully understand the repercussions of gender-based violence and commit to this cause, a universal consensus cannot be reached. Hence, the UN should impose serious sanctions on member-states that consistently violate the terms of international treaties so effective measures are taken and women's rights abuses are stopped.

In order to prevent violence against women, nations must work together to build a culture of support, equality and community. Therefore, Spain looks forward to offering its support for measures taken to firmly eradicate violence against women in all its forms. My country hopes to see a global community where women are treated with respect and dignity and seen as the social, political and economic equals of men.

Sources/Bibliography:

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