

## **Joint Press Statement**

**by Women for Women's Human Rights-New Ways Association (WWHR), Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation and Association for Support of Women Candidates (Ka.Der)**

As the women's organizations that have been struggling for many years in the fields of violence against women and equal representation of women, we, the Women for Women's Human Rights-New Ways Association (WWHR), Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation and the Association for Support of Women Candidates (Ka.Der) were invited to "the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee established in order to investigate all aspects of the causes of violence against women and determine the measures to be taken", which we have been following from the press for some time. We attended the committee meeting held on June 23, 2021 and shared our views on combatting violence against women and on the committee.

We have been sharing our knowledge and experience in the field of combating violence against women with the public in various forms for many years; revealing the shortcomings of policy and implementation in Turkey and suggesting solutions. Those who want to learn and work on the subject can use our resources. As we also shared at the committee meeting, we would like to inform the public about the policies that make it impossible to struggle against violence against women and lead to the discrimination and violence against women and LGBTI+ in Turkey.

Following the decision on Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on March 20, 2021 despite the objection of women's organizations and the majority of the people, we clearly see that the approach and knowledge produced directly as a result of thirty years of field work on combating violence against women has not been considered as a guide for public policies, as such we see that some members of the parliament had no objection at all to the withdrawal decision. As the name of the committee suggests, we understand that there is still a need to understand the causes of violence against women. The fact that the approach and knowledge produced by women's organizations based on 30 years of practice cannot be translated into public policies, leads to the inefficient use of our social resources in solving the issue, sets barriers to ensure gender equality and prevents elimination of discrimination and violence against women and LGBTI+. Istanbul Convention from which Turkey has withdrawn is a strategy document on the causes of violence providing a framework on how it can be avoided.

We had witnessed a similar scene with the "Parliamentary Inquiry Committee established in order to investigate the divorces and the elements that adversely affect family integrity and to determine the measures to be taken to strengthen the family institution". In the committee report, we identified many paragraphs that come to mean a backlash against the rights of women and girls. When we saw the issues discussed at the committee today, we left the meeting with more concerns that the risk of taking our rights from our hands, including the Law No. 6284 has become greater than ever as there was no objection to withdrawal from the Convention by the government MPs to the Commission and they could not even tolerate any reference to the Convention or our criticisms.

Combating violence against women is the responsibility and obligation of the state. At this point in time in Turkey, the state is completely distracted from this goal and the policies confining women to their homes where they face violence, let alone protecting them from violence, are on the rise. The functioning of the mechanisms established to combat violence in Turkey and women's access to their rights secured by the law have become harder. The right to abortion in public hospitals is inaccessible; there is still a lack of coordination in the implementation of Law No. 6284 despite of the fact that almost a decade has passed since its enactment; impunity has become the norm in crimes of violence against women and sexual abuse; the civil servants, especially the law enforcement agencies, adopt an approach far from supporting women who struggle to protect themselves from violence; and that malpractices such as

discouraging women from filing complaints and attempts to reunite women with men inflicting violence on them go unpunished and unsanctioned.

As feminists, we have been voicing the root causes of violence against women strongly for many years. The root cause of violence is the patriarchal system that does not see women as equal to men, aiming to control women, to sustain inequalities of power, and to restrict women's ability to speak for their own lives as equal individuals. This is exactly what the Istanbul Convention says. The Convention recognizes that "the realization of *de jure* and *de facto* equality between women and men is a key element in the prevention of violence against women."

As feminists and women's organizations working in the field, we have been expressing for years how the fight against violence against women should be. The authorities who stand by women and make an effort to create a transformation aimed at empowering women, can make use of these resources. We participated the parliamentary inquiry committee meeting not to repeat what we have been saying for decades, but to present and note the facts once again by voicing what has been done against women. The most comprehensive and effective road map for the fight against violence is the Istanbul Convention to which Turkey had been the first signatory. We call upon the Government to reverse the decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention without causing further irrevocable damages, to fully implement the Convention with the participation of independent women's organizations and Turkey to adopt an approach in line with a democratic rule of law and aligned with universal human rights standards.

Istanbul Convention is Ours! We're not giving it up!

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