

WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN, GEORGIA 2011/2012

Speech in support of the UN - UNiTE to END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN - Campaign
02/12/2011



END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

*"Others will respect you for standing up against people who have done detestable things",
Honoré de Balzac on the meaning of 'Noblesse Oblige' in "Le Lys dans la Vallée"*

On behalf of the European Union in Georgia, I have the honor to address you on the single most pervasive human rights violation that we know today, which is violence against women and girls; as it devastates lives, fractures communities, and stalls development. It is for this reason, that I am pleased to report on the implementation of this years' White Ribbon Campaign in Georgia, which aims at addressing violence against women and girls from a very promising angle, namely that of the source and solution of the problem: MEN.

The EU wholeheartedly welcomes all action to combat violence against women and girls, including the prevention of such violence, protection and support for victims, and prosecution of perpetrators, and the prioritization of such actions on the national political agendas.

Violence against women and girls is a worldwide problem of pandemic proportions and comes at a gigantic cost.

Statistics show that 1 in 3 women experience violence in their lifetime, and for women between 15 and 45, acts of violence cause more death and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined. Domestic violence alone costs worldwide over 100 billion US Dollar a year. Violence against

women and girls leaves deep psychological scars, further compounded by a prevailing culture of impunity. Caused by domestic violence, the scars may transcend through generations.

These statistics exacerbate in conflict and post-conflict situations, when normal protection mechanisms are faltering, when the threat for women does not only come from the 'enemy', but can equally come from their own side. When the common foot-soldier is empowered with a gun and impunity, when husbands, male neighbours and friends are distressed having lost their traditional roles and control, and when a culture of violence is thriving, women and girls are prone to become the victim.

Dear Colleagues, allow me to briefly introduce the WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN

The White Ribbon Campaign is the largest men-to-men global movement to stop men's violence against women. The campaign is straightforward: WEARING the ribbon is a personal pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls. This pledge includes all violence against women, be it physical or psychological, in public or in private, be it in peacetime or in war. 25 November is the first day of the Campaign that last until 10 December.

Why does the EU in GEORGIA support it?

Violence against women and girls is a problem in every society, unfortunately also in Georgia, and the White Ribbon Campaign calls on all good men within all societies to make a stand, therefore also on the many righteous Georgian men.

(Background)

The Campaign started in 1991 in response to a massacre of 14 female students in Montreal, Canada, killed out of blind hate and disrespect for women. This tragic event triggered a movement of men wearing a white ribbon and engaging in discussion and debates, that has already spread to over 55 countries.

YOU may ask: “Why targeting MEN?”

- i. MEN, as they are the source of the problem, are the key to the solution;
- ii. MEN can influence attitudes and behavior of other men;
- iii. MEN have the power to turn around cultures and traditions of violence.

Distinguished audience, today the EU, UN Women, Embassies and International Organizations operating in Georgia, join hands with their Georgian counterparts in support of the White Ribbon Campaign 2011.

I am pleased to report that the 290 men, and indeed women, working in EUMM - military, police and civilian –warmly and actively endorse the campaign. EUMM’s current activities include a poster campaign for which we have found a most gracious ally in the National Rugby Team, already a long term supporter in the combat against gender based violence. The poster features 4 prominent rugby-players, who invite all potential perpetrators to come and rather scrum with them. The posters will be distributed to police stations, for which we owe gratitude to the Georgian MIA, to schools and other public places across the country.

Further, I am most delighted to report that UN Women and the EU had a booster of success with the Georgian Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, where we met with representatives of the athletics-, basket ball-, football-, gymnastic-, judo, rugby-, wrestling-, and women football Federations. All these federations agreed to support the White Ribbon campaign. In follow up meetings, concrete actions will be discussed. The aim of the longer term EU/UN collaboration with the Georgian Sports Federations is to partner with them as allies in changing attitudes. The partnership will be launched on International Human Rights Day, 10 December 2011 and activities will be included in a three year long UN Women-programme (2012-2015) funded by Swedish International Development Aid, SIDA. The White Ribbon will be used as a symbol of zero tolerance against gender based violence.

Dear fellow men, although wearing the ribbon is only temporary, from 25 November to 10 December (and you have already missed a week), the pledge to never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls is lasting.

The Ultimate Reward lies in the knowledge that with your support to end all violence against women you have contributed to the realization of the greater good of humanity, reaffirmed in the declared faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and the worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women, and in the determination to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. – as so eloquently outlined in the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which coincidentally was signed 10 December, 1948 (!)

Lastly, to all those man who think it is silly to wear a white ribbon, I say: “knowing the staggering statistics of the intense and silent suffering of the many millions of violated women, it would be more ABSURD NOT to wear the white ribbon.”

Thank you very much for your kind attention and indeed for your support!