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Ms. Helena Dalli

Commissioner for Equality
European Commission
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 27 January 2020

Concerns: implementation of measures to tackle the rise of domestic violence and violence against women and girls during the pandemic and development of an EU protocol for violence against women in times of crises.

Dear Commissioner Dalli,

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed an alarming increase of violence against women and girls. Many reports have warned of the “perfect storm”, manifesting in increased calls to help-lines, online support services, and police reports. Lockdowns, social isolation, increased levels of financial stress, and weak institutional response have contributed to increase and intensified levels of gender-based violence.

Since the beginning of 2021, many Member States are reinforcing measures to respond to the new peaks in infections and deaths - with curfews, lockdowns and other restrictive measures. For this reason, dear Commissioner, we urgently call on you **to ensure that Member States are implementing measures to prevent and monitor violence against women, guarantee continuity of essential services that offer protection against domestic violence, and to provide training and learning opportunities to law enforcement officials.**

Our Group, Renew Europe, launched an *Action Plan to combat Violence Against Women (VAW) during the Covid-19 Crisis and the Recovery ahead in July 2020*. It contains a 10-points action plan to combat VAW during the pandemic. This Action Plan outlines key areas for action and protection services for women victims, which must be guaranteed and improved by Member States during this crisis. Among the concrete actions outlined is an **EU protocol for violence against women in times of crises.**

This call is also reflected in the report on the gender perspective in the COVID-19 crisis and post-crisis, adopted during the last plenary session. The European Parliament examined the impact of the pandemic on women and acknowledged that the public response from Member States has been insufficient in addressing violence against women during the pandemic.

For these reasons, we would like to reiterate the urgency of this call. The **EU protocol for violence against women in times of crises** should be used by the Commission and the Member States to prevent violence against women and to support victims during the crisis. It should include **key protection services, such as helplines, safe accommodation and health services** that must be



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considered **“essential services” in the Member States**, to support victims of domestic violence in the event of crisis and emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commission should also issue **specific guidelines** to Member States, service providers and civil society organisations working in the field of preventing and combatting domestic violence on how to continue, expand and strengthen service provision, support victims during the crisis and post-crisis recovery period. Moreover, **Member States** must also implement complementary **risk management measures** involving the police, justice and health sectors to ensure a coordinated response to the increased risk of gender-based violence and to provide dedicated contingency measures in view of the current resurgence of the virus.

Dear Commissioner, during the last plenary session you declared that by the end of 2021, the Commission will present a **legislative proposal to prevent and combat specific forms of gender-based violence**. You also committed to move forward during 2021 **the extension to the list of EU crimes to include hate speech and hate crime, including based on a person’s gender**.

We would like to urge you, Dear Commissioner, to also include the new **EU protocol for violence against women in times of crises** among these upcoming initiatives on gender-based violence.

We cannot wait any longer. We do not want more women to fall victim of domestic violence. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown, once more, that for some women not even their home is a safe place. We need to ensure that all Member States implement a gender-sensitive response in their public health measures.

Thank you for your kind consideration,

Yours sincerely,

Soraya Rodriguez Ramos
Samira Rafaela
Karen Melchior
Hilde Vautmans
Chrysoula Zacharopoulou
Abir Al-Sahlani
Sylvie Brunet
Radka Maxová
Susana Solis Perez
Irène Tolleret

Renew Europe FEMM Team