

**We stand out for  
the International Day  
for the Elimination of  
Violence against Women  
(November 25):**

# Implement the Istanbul Convention!

It has been another year in which governments have failed to fulfill their obligations to prevent violence against women, as well as implementing necessary and effective measures for the COVID-19 pandemic. In this period, attacks on women's and LGBTI+ rights, especially the right to abortion and the Istanbul Convention, and gender equality have increased all over the world. In Turkey, our rights are under attack again as the government declared in July that Turkey might withdraw their signature from the Istanbul Convention. In the current extraordinary period, where we fight a pandemic, we have observed femicide and male violence continues in a widespread manner across Turkey, and the government's inadequate mechanisms to combat violence against women are now completely blocked. As in all crises, there have been no or very little measures taken for those groups who have experienced the effects of the pandemic in the most painful way, including women, children, the elderly, the disabled, refugees, LGBTI+'s etc.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we, as women's organizations, have been calling the government to create an emergency action plan in order to prevent gender-based violence. However, far from drafting an action plan, the government amended its legal and administrative practices for women's vested rights and turned them against women. With a decree of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors published in March 2020, the judges were instructed that the protective and preventing measures to be issued should not put the health of the perpetrators at risk. We have voiced our warning that this instruction run the risk of impeding any preventive measures of suspension of the perpetrator from the shared residence being issued to perpetrators of violence. Since then, we have witnessed cases where restraining orders were not implemented effectively, women were killed despite restraining orders, women murderers tried to get sentence

reductions on the grounds of "honor" in their defense, and violence went unpunished.

The spiral of violence which women, children, and LGBTI+'s already find themselves in due to stay-at-home coronavirus measures risks has further exacerbated with the release of perpetrators of violence against women following the latest amendments to the Law on the Execution of Sentences and Security Measures, which was adopted despite all the objections of women. We have followed the news about the cases of femicide and male violence committed by those men released as per the latest amendments to the Law. 7 months later, the government officials announced that they were planning to extend the coronavirus leave again, as thousands of prisoners cannot be recalled in practice. The protective and preventive measures demanded by women's organizations have still not been taken.

Simultaneously with the amendments to the execution law, the government tried to propose an amnesty for child abusers before the Parliament in the middle of a night. Although this proposal was not presented before the Parliament due to the huge reactions, there is still an effort to grant amnesty under the name "young marriages" for perpetrators of child abuse. Immediately after the discussions on amnesty for child abuse, the President of Religious Affairs published a sermon blaming homosexuals, extramarital affairs and those living with HIV+ for the pandemic. A number of cases of violence and discrimination against LGBTI+'s have been reported by human rights organizations after this sermon, which was also supported by some ministers and members of the Parliament and the President's Office. Moreover, using the coronavirus measures as an excuse, 18 transgender women living on Bayram street in Beyoğlu were detained in a raid to their homes at midnight, kept in a tiny room for hours, and their human rights were violated.



As a result of the intense social opposition of women that lasted for weeks and was growing day by day, the debate on the Istanbul Convention seems to have faded, just like the discussions on amnesty for child abuse or alimony right, we know that the issue has not disappeared from the agenda. We are aware that the government, which actually prevents women from exercising their abortion rights, is trying to make the Istanbul Convention forgotten and hinder its implementation. We experienced the most concrete example of this in the preliminary meeting of the 4<sup>th</sup> National Action Plan for 2021-2025 on Combating Violence Against Women coordinated by the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services. A number of independent women's organizations working in the field for long years were not invited to the meeting at the first stage. A few women's organizations made a great effort and managed to attend the meeting, but their demands that the action plan should be prepared on the basis of and with reference to the Istanbul Convention were not reflected in the meeting notes. The effect of an action plan prepared in this way in combating violence is a matter of debate.

Finally, immediately after the debate on the Istanbul Convention, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services made statements that the alimony right would be restricted, which implies that the attacks on women's rights would be continued by the government, and the demands of some misogynist and anti-gender groups have been adopted by the government in a holistic agenda.

At a time when the attacks on gender equality and women's rights have become so systematic, intensified and ordinary, we are looking for ways to cope with the new challenges that the pandemic has brought to our lives, on the one hand, and on the other, we struggle with attacks on our rights. On November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, we once again remind the government and all officials of their obligation to implement gender equality and combat male violence, and we call them to take the following necessary steps to eliminate violence against women completely and ensure gender equality:

- ♀ **Immediately stop putting under discussion gender equality and women's human rights as guaranteed in the Constitution and international human rights conventions, attacking our rights and preparing the ground for further attacks;**
- ♀ **listen to the demands of independent women's organizations. Only women should have the say over their rights and lives.**
- ♀ **implement the Istanbul Convention and the Law No. 6284 in an effective manner;**
- ♀ **fulfill your obligations to implement the laws completely and without discrimination;**
- ♀ **implement participatory and transparent methods in combating violence against women.**

#IstanbulConventionIsOurs  
we will not give up!

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