



# ITALY

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN  
53<sup>RD</sup> SESSION

STATEMENT BY

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(New York, Monday, 2 March 2009)

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Mr. President,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When Italy was elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2007, it underlined its commitment to renewed national and international efforts in the area of gender and the protection of women's rights. One of our priorities is the issue of violence against women, the starting point for my remarks today.

Research has shown that violence against women is a global problem, although there is little recognition or reporting of this fact. The various forms of sexual violence range from rape to assault, sexual acts with minors, the corruption of minors, and sexual assaults by groups of men. Not to mention sexual molestation, forced relations with third parties, unwanted sexual acts performed for fear of retaliation, and degrading or humiliating sexual acts. This phenomenon occurs even within the family and affects women of every social and educational level, causing immense physical and mental harm as well as high social and economic costs for the community.

In the past fifteen years, many amendments have been made to Italian laws to protect women and minors from sexual or domestic violence. The 1996 law converting such acts from "crimes against public morality" into "crimes against the person" – by which is meant the whole person in his or her integrity – was a milestone in how radically our views of this dramatic problem have changed. Italian legislation in such cases is among the world's strictest, providing for prison sentences of up to 14 years for the basic crime. Greater attention by the media and public opinion to the most heinous episodes has led to a greater awareness of the

seriousness of this phenomenon and an alleged increase in cases of sexual violence in our country.

The Italian Government has recently confirmed its commitment to the fight against sexual violence. On 20 February 2009, it issued a decree that immediately implemented tough measures to combat crimes relating to sexual violence, in view of the social alarm created by the greater frequency and level of ferocity of such crimes. The decree's measures include a life sentence if and when such crimes lead to the death of the victim.

The decree introduces the crime of stalking to the penal code, through amendments to the measure I submitted to the Council of Ministers on 18 June 2008. Until this provision, there was no appropriate sanction in Italian law for the stalking that often precedes acts of violence. Italian women as a whole have hailed this new provision as a success.

The Italian Government thus has a very strong commitment to this issue.

The Ministry for Equal Opportunities seeks to be a catalyst for implementing social and legislative initiatives and for supporting and conducting research in the field. Such research has yielded useful data that allows us to identify frameworks in which strategies should be developed to prevent and counter violence in Italy. The Ministry for Equal Opportunities, which I proudly serve, has activated a National Anti-Violence Network and a special Call Center for victims of violence. It has also supported an awareness-raising campaign on violence against women to be launched this month through the mass media (TV, press, and radio) as a valid support through which to denounce acts of violence that too often go unreported. I have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Defense and the Carabinieri to form an expert group to counter the serious crime of

stalking. The expert office of my Ministry is currently in the later phases of drafting a special protocol – to be signed jointly by the Minister of the Interior and the Head of the National Police Force – that will be an important component of the future National Plan against Violence. Lastly, I have proposed increasing the resources of the Fund against gender and sexual violence.

In the international and national framework, Italy is strongly committed to fighting another major and alarming practice: female genital mutilation. UNFPA and UNICEF estimate that between 100 and 140 million women worldwide have been subject to this practice. Approximately 3 million girls are at risk each year of falling victim to this form of mutilation. Female genital mutilation is a grave violation of human rights, of a person's physical integrity, and of the right to health of a woman, girl, or child.

The Italian Government strongly condemns the use of violence against women as a result of religious practice, tradition or custom. In 2006 the Italian Parliament passed a special law (2006 N.7) protecting women from female genital mutilation, pursuant to Articles 2, 3 and 32 of the Italian Constitution and to the principles enshrined in the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action adopted on 15 September 1995 at the fourth UN World Conference on Women. Italy's penal code severely punishes those who, for no therapeutic purposes, cause the mutilation of female genital organs (by a four- to twelve-year prison sentence). It also provides for a three- to seven-year prison sentence for those who, in the absence of therapeutic needs and for the purpose of disabling sexual functions, cause lesions to female genital organs, resulting in physical or mental illness. The provisions of this Article are also applied when the crime is committed abroad either by or against an Italian citizen or foreign resident of Italy. In such cases, the perpetrators

are punished at the request of the Ministry of Justice. We are also re-establishing the commission for preventing and countering female genital mutilation, which I will chair and whose members will include the Under-Secretary of State for Labor, Health and Social Policies, Eugenia Roccella, and Hon. Emma Bonino – thus confirming the commitment of the entire political spectrum to this issue.

At the international level, I would like to add that since 2003, Italy has been the main contributor to the United Nations program against female genital mutilation. In late 2007 we were pleased to welcome UNFPA and UNICEF's launch of the Multi-Donor Fund against female genital mutilation. Italy became one of its main contributors last year and invites all donor countries to consider the possibility of contributing to this important Fund, which is still severely underfunded. Cooperation in this field must also be combined with political initiatives. We firmly believe that the international community must keep its focus on this issue and be prepared to take a position on abolishing it.

Governments must strive to ensure the fundamental rights of women to health and guarantee access to treatment, particularly in the case of diseases such as HIV/AIDS. The decision to dedicate this session of the CSW to the "equal sharing of responsibility between men and women, including in the treatment of HIV/AIDS," is particularly crucial. Women are a highly vulnerable percentage of the population with respect to HIV infection. In many countries treatment is administered in the home and 90% of these treatments are administered by women. Evidence has shown that, paradoxically, it is women who end up having limited access to treatment. It is essential that gender differences be taken into account by institutions, both governmental and non, in defining programs for HIV research,

prevention and action. Ignoring gender differences would in fact seriously limit the effectiveness of such programs and make any effort fruitless.

In closing, allow me to salute women, especially the young women in this hall. This session has issued a challenge to you: namely, to find the courage to worry about your future. Find the courage not to hide your femininity, thinking that it may be a distraction from your intelligence. Prove that you do not need to conform to masculine stereotypes to advance in your careers, and that you do not need to lose your identity. Most importantly, find the courage to face the challenge posed not by the opposite sex, but by the vital issues of today, our society, by age-old and harmful misconceptions. Women no longer wish to stand out simply because they are women. The true revolution depends on your ability to work with passion, discipline and sacrifice.

Thank you for your attention.

