

Press Release

Directorate of Communication

Ref: 189a10

Tel. +33 3 88 41 25 60

Fax +33 3 88 41 39 11

Internet: www.coe.int

e-mail: pressunit@coe.int



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8 March 2010 - International Women's Day

Improving the lives of women in Europe through the Rule of Law

Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland calls on states to do more to eradicate discrimination against women

Strasbourg, 05.03.2010 – On the occasion of International Women's Day, Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, said: "It is time for states and all social actors to take direct action – not only through legislation, but also by introducing social policies, to fight discrimination against women. They must promote cultural change to make equality of women and men a reality."

"Are women and men equally represented in political, economic and social life? Do the courts do enough to protect women from violence in the home? Are national systems and institutions really effective in promoting gender equality?" he asked.

"The legal status of women in Europe has improved in recent years, but progress is far too slow. There remains a great deal to be done. We need a major leap, with new policies and strategies. In spite of our proud ideals, European democracies are missing a leg, and that leg is true equality between men and women", he said.

"The European Court of Human Rights has developed case law by interpreting the European Convention on Human Rights, and played a significant role in shaping the rights of women and men in Europe. It is essential that member states fully implement the case law of the Court at national level in order to consolidate the protection of those rights", concluded Thorbjørn Jagland.

Note to editors

In order to mark the 60th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe is highlighting the Court's case-law and its impact on legislative developments in Europe on key international days, such as the International Women's Day.

There are some human rights violations which concern women particularly. The Court has for example delivered judgments on issues such as the protection of women from domestic violence ([Opuz v. Turkey](#)), sexual violence ([M.C. v. Bulgaria](#)), discrimination against single mothers ([Marckx v. Belgium](#)), the right to carry a maiden name ([Ünal Tekeli v. Turkey](#)), protection of physical integrity ([Y.F. v. Turkey](#)) and trafficking in human beings ([Rantsev v. Cyprus and Russia](#)).

[Link to fact sheet on the judgments of the Court](#)

[Link to special file on International Women's Day](#)

Did you know?

- The Council of Europe today published a study - ["Parity democracy - A far cry from reality"](#) – which concludes that in the last years no major progress has been achieved to increase the presence of women in political decision making bodies. The report calls

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A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 47 member states.

for the creation of a new momentum in member states to implement the 2003 Council of Europe Committee of Ministers [Recommendation](#) which set a 40% minimum threshold in public decision making bodies for both men and women.

- The Council of Europe is preparing a convention on protecting women from all kinds of violence, including domestic violence. The Convention will be eventually opened for signature in 2011.

More information: [European Court of Human Rights](#), [Gender equality](#)

Human Rights TV debate: to mark International Women's Day, the Council of Europe is organising a TV debate that will bring together representatives of business and experts to discuss progress made on gender equality and the remaining challenges. The programme will be available on 8 March at www.coe.int.

Contact: Jaime Rodríguez Tel. +33 (0) 689 99 50 42; jaime.rodriquez@coe.int