

# Optimizing Female Doctors' Role and Understanding for Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of Women

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12 October 2019, Genova



**Cyprus, Eastern Mediterranean Sea**

**Neurologist  
Unionist  
President of CTP Women  
Organisation  
Elected representative of  
Turkish Cypriot Community  
FEMS delegate**

**Venetian Column (1550)  
Located in the heart of the old Nicosia  
One of the symbols of the city**



**Caterina Cornaro, last queen of Cyprus  
“Queen of Arts”**



## **Presentation will focus on:**

- 1. Women rights are human rights**
- 2. Sexual and reproductive rights of women**
- 3. Legal, religious, and medical situation of induced abortion in the region**
- 4. Responsibilities of women doctors and medical associations to eliminate «desperate women, troubled health professionals, and scared politicians»**

## **Presentation mainly based on:**

- 1. Publications of United Nations**
- 2. Publications of World Health Organisation**
- 3. Council of Europe**



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

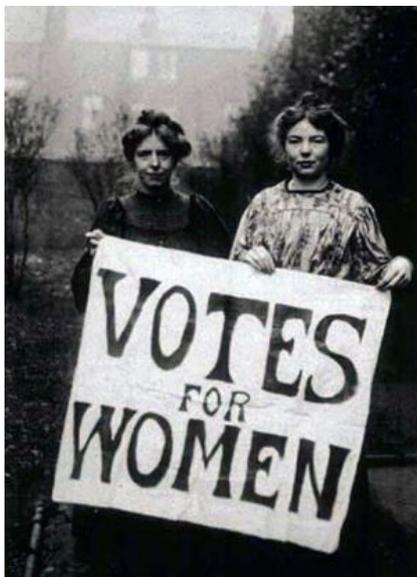
COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



- right to live free from violence, slavery, and discrimination;
- to be educated;
- to own property;
- to vote;
- and to earn a fair and equal wage
- almost everywhere around the world, women and girls are still deprived of them, often simply because of their gender**



**Winning rights for women is about changing how countries and communities work, involves changing laws and policies, winning hearts and minds, and investing in strong women's organizations and movements**

**A long-standing struggle**

**Tireless and courageous efforts of women's groups working to ensure women can own property, vote, run for office, get paid fair wages, and live free from violence – including domestic violence, sexual assault, and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation**

# Women in War

In World War I and II women employed in factories, farming, and other roles to replace men drafted for the army

Women's participating in the economy during war ensue women movements to become more empowered





UNITED NATIONS  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

Convention (C) on the Elimination (E)  
of All Forms of Discrimination (D)  
against (A) Women (W) (**CEDAW**)

***Nothing happens by itself- you have to fight and work for it!!***

-a body established in **1946** monitor situation of women and to promote women's rights

-**thirty years** of work by the UN Commission on the Status of Women concluded **CEDAW, 1979 (constitution of women rights)**

-**CEDAW** is the central document for **gender equality**

-it advocates, "*a proper understanding of maternity as a social function*", demanding **fully shared responsibility for child-rearing** by both sexes

-also devotes major attention to a most vital concern of women, **reproductive rights**

-affirms women's right to reproductive choice. Mentions family planning is a human right



**Important milestone in the struggle**

**187 nations signed CEDAW, 7 have not**

**North Cyprus signed CEDAW in 1996**

**How could CEDAW be implemented in the EU legal framework?**

**2011**

**Signing the Convention alone is not enough, full implementation of CEDAW within the EU and also nation's local legislation and policy has vital importance**



## Beijing Declaration, 1995

-inequalities between women and men have persisted and major obstacles remain, with serious consequences for the well-being of all people

-increasing poverty that is affecting the lives of the majority of the world's people, in particular women and children

What to do?

-dedicate ourselves empowerment of women all over the world

-reaffirm commitment to equal rights and inherent human dignity of women and men

-Universal Declaration of Human Rights, CEDAW

- full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child

- Women's rights are human rights

-the right of all women to their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment

## **Istanbul Convention 2011 (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence)**

-a significant achievement toward **gender equality** and **women's empowerment**, not only in Europe but globally

-legally-binding convention which sets out very clear directives and commitments for taking **action on preventing, protecting, prosecuting and responding to violence against women** and in particular **domestic violence**, which for so long was seen as a private issue, not to be tackled by the State

-**women's sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights**

-critical importance of respecting and promoting sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights for ending violence against women

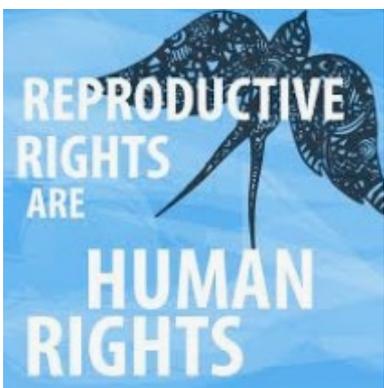


**32 state and 19 EU member ratified the Istanbul Convention 2011 (the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence)**

**North Cyprus ratified Istanbul Convention in 2011**

**Prevention, protection and response strategies on violence against women fully integrate sexual and reproductive health and rights, including related educational, awareness-raising and service provision measures.**





## Sexual and Reproductive Rights of Women



- Abortion is a social reality that can no more be legislated out of existence
- No matter how effective family planning services and practices become, **there will always be a need for access to safe abortion services**
- The association between **restrictive abortion laws** and **unsafe abortion** has been well documented
- The average rate of unsafe abortion is estimated to be more than **four times higher** in countries with more restrictive abortion laws than in countries with less restrictive laws
- Restrictive abortion laws** are also associated with **higher levels of maternal mortality**
- Moreover the average maternal mortality ratio is three times higher in countries with more restrictive abortion laws (223 maternal deaths per 100 000 live births) compared to countries with less restrictive laws (77 maternal deaths per 100 000 live births)

*Abortion policies and reproductive health around the world. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division; 2014*

## **Nowadays Women are Still Dying Because of Unsafe Abortion**

Abortion was legally restricted in almost every country by the end of the nineteenth century.

WHO first recognized unsafe abortion as a serious public health problem in 1967

Despite the human rights for providing safe abortion evolved greatly;

**\*22 million unsafe abortions each year**

**\*47,000 women die**

**\*5 million women suffer from consequence disabilities**

*Ahman E. New estimates and trends regarding unsafe abortion mortality. International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics, 2011*

**In nearly all developed countries safe abortions are legally available and are generally easily accesible**

**In countries where induced abortion is legally highly restricted and/or unavailable, safe abortion become the privilege of the rich. Poor and poorly educated women resort to unsafe providers**

*Safe Abortion. World Health Organisation. 2012*



**Restrictive abortion laws and policies create risks to women and girls' health by deterring them from seeking care and hindering providers from delivering services within the formal health system**

Barriers that affect women and girls' access to safe abortion;

- \* Restrictive legal grounds for abortion
- \* Policies that limit provision of abortion care to obstetricians and gynaecologists working at high-level care facilities;
- Objection by health-care providers, unnecessary medical tests, counselling; mandatory waiting periods

- \* **delays for women receiving care**
- \* **increasing the costs of safe abortion services**
- \* **limiting the availability of services**
- \* **Inequality within sociogeographic distribution**
- \* **Pregnancy advancing beyond legally allowed gestational limit**

## **WHO Recommendations Related to Regulatory, Policy, and Human Rights Considerations on Abortion:**

- Laws and policies on abortion should protect women's health and their human rights
- Regulatory, policy and programmatic barriers that hinder access to and timely provision of safe abortion care should be removed
- An enabling regulatory and policy environment is needed to ensure that every woman is legally eligible has ready access to safe abortion care
- Policies should be geared to respecting and fulfilling the human rights of women, providing contraceptive information, meeting needs of poor women, adolescents, rape survivors and women living with HIV

# Situation in North Cyprus

The law regulating the abortion;

- Allows abortion on request during the first 10 weeks of the pregnancy, which is similar with Turkey but shorter than most of the developed countries and South Cyprus ( 12 weeks)
- Law is restrictive and punitive. Punishes everyone having and providing an abortion beyond the legal time
- Moreover father consent is mandatory

Access to health services;

\*Public hospitals do not supply induced abortion service even during the legal time, women can access the service and care only at the private hospitals by out-of-pocket expense, which raises a great inequality within women

\* Vast majority of the community are Muslims, not the religion itself but patriarchal traditions and conservative behaviours and policies are obstacles facing Turkish Cypriot women

# Situation in North Cyprus

\*There are 9 female elected representatives out of 50 (18%)

\* As three female representatives from the left party we gave a law proposal recently offering to extend the legal abortion time from 10 to 14 weeks and eliminate father consent

\*Conservatives including other female representatives rejected

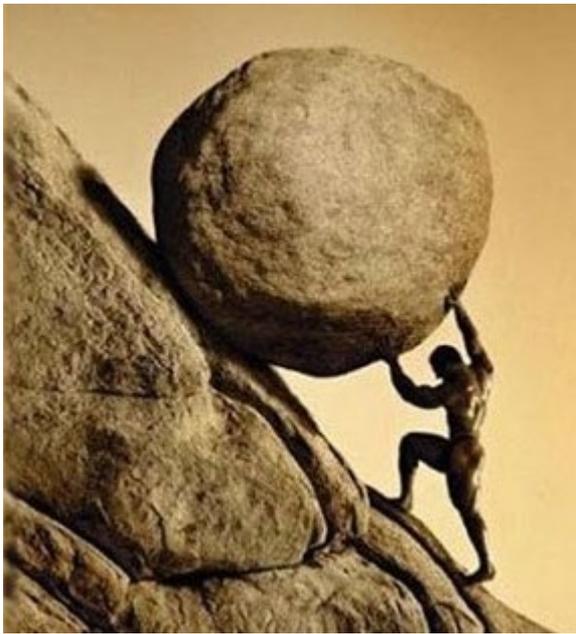
\* Unfortunately Medical Association suggested to keep legal time as 10 weeks

•This time we couldn't manage but we will try again

•We also asked Ministry of Health to provide safe abortion services at the public hospitals and Ministry of Education to supply sexual education at the schools

•We need;

•1) high quality reproductive health services that respect women's autonomy and dignity; 2) early sex education; 3) lifestyle changes to place responsibility also on men for contraception, family formation, and rearing; 4) increased government funding for service and training.



## **To conclude...**

Women rights are human rights

Violence against women is a global public health and human rights problem affecting women's sexual and reproductive health, and their human rights

Criminal sanctions have no impact on the abortion or birth rates, but are associated with unsafe abortion

Restrictions on access to safe abortion create inequalities both within and between countries

Respecting and promoting sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights has great importance on ending violence against women

Doctors and medical associations are empowered stakeholders who has the capacity to influence both the community and the decision/policy makers

We should avoid stigmatization and prejudgment as health-care professionals

We should protect women's human rights, reproductive and sexual health and rights

And defend gender equality in every aspect through our practice

**Europe must lead the way and be unified on such issues**



**Let's unite our forces for more equality and freedom for women in Europe**

**Grazie mille...**