

# **Manifesto for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women**

## **25 November 2021**

Today, 25 November 2021, we join the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women with the desire for all the actions and events held around this date to be extended to every day of the year. The struggle for a life free of violence must be a daily one.

Yet, in an increasingly fast-paced and changing world, there are structures that resist change, such as the root causes of all types, forms and areas of gender-based violence. Among these forms of violence, some are evolving, others are emerging and yet others are just being recognised, as is the case with the passing of Law 17/2020 of 22 December, which amends and extends Law 5/2008 of 24 April, on the right of women to eliminate gender-based violence.

The amendment to this Law recognises new forms of violence, such as:

— **Obstetric violence and the violation of sexual and reproductive rights**, which is defined as violence exercised with the aim of preventing or obstructing access to accurate information necessary for autonomous, informed decision-making. It can affect different areas of physical and mental health, including sexual and reproductive health, and can prevent or impede women from making decisions about their sexual activity and preferences and about their right to reproduction and the conditions under which they choose to exercise it.

— **Second-order violence**, which consists of physical or psychological violence, reprisals, humiliation and persecution toward people who support victims of gender-based violence. It includes acts that obstruct the prevention, detection, care and recovery of women in situations of gender-based violence.

— **Proxy violence**, defined as any type of violence perpetrated against daughters and sons as a means of causing psychological harm to the mother, whereby, in addition to the direct violence targeted at daughters and sons in the context of gender-based violence, it also aims to harm the mother, thus attacking both motherhood and childhood.

— **Digital violence**, which consists of all acts of online gender-based violence and misogyny committed, instigated, amplified or aggravated, in part or in whole, by the use of information and communication technologies, social networking platforms, websites and forums, email and instant messaging systems and other similar media that affect women's dignity and rights. These acts cause psychological and even physical harm; they reinforce sexist stereotypes; they damage dignity and reputation; they violate women's privacy and freedom of action; they cause women financial losses; and they obstruct their political participation and freedom of expression.

Digital gender-based violence is both another type and a new area for such violence. Unfortunately, work is urgently needed, benefitting as it does from remarkable impunity in all its forms. A number of studies, such as one published by *Pikara Magazine* in 2018 or one by Amnesty International in 2017, show that 76% of women have changed their behaviour for fear of suffering cyberbullying and 26% choose to ignore the situation, most likely because the system is failing to provide effective responses that ensure women who suffer this type of violence receive the protection and security they need.

However, we must not forget that social media networks are also an instrument for mutual support and sisterhood, and that they can become a channel for denouncing and making many forms of gender-based violence visible. This is why social media needs to be reinforced from a feminist perspective, to ensure it also becomes an instrument for awareness and survival within the patriarchal system.

The above-mentioned amendment to the Law also recognises different areas in which gender-based violence occurs:

— **Violence in women's political and public lives**. In this case, gender-based violence occurs in the public and political spheres, such as political institutions and government bodies, political parties and the traditional and social media.

— **Violence in the institutional sphere**, consisting of actions and omissions by authorities, public employees and agents of public bodies or institutions with the intention of delaying, obstructing or preventing access to public policies and exercising the rights recognised by the same Law to ensure a life free of gender-based violence, as set out in applicable specific legislation. This provides us with a new legal instrument with which to combat this type of violence.

Finally, we would like to highlight the impact and indignation caused by **sexual violence**, something that shakes us to the core. From today, 25 November, we wish to reiterate our full support and empathy toward its survivors and those around them. We cannot continue to allow women to live in fear, their freedom curtailed by the threat of sexual assault that should be eliminated from a free, democratic society. Sexual violence violates the principle of individual freedom. Thus, for the first time, Law 17/2020 includes a definition of the concept of sexual consent, which is understood as the express will, in the context of sexual freedom and personal dignity, that permits and endorses the exercise of sexual activity. Such consent must be freely given and maintained throughout sexual activity. Consent does not exist if the aggressor creates conditions or takes advantage of a context that, directly or indirectly, imposes sexual activity without the woman's consent.

Despite progress in identifying and raising the visibility of all forms of gender-based violence, there is still a long way to go in raising society's awareness, as the most common of all reactions among men is still denial and defensiveness. However, today we wish to emphasise all the actions, by both individuals and the community, that are essential to eliminating gender-based violence. Actions that are a source of support and resilience for survivors, actions that demonstrate commitment, involvement, courage and ethics, and actions that, from a position of self-determination, accompany survivors so they feel they are 'not alone' before, during and after sexist aggression.

We must therefore stipulate and coordinate the necessary actions against all these types of gender-based violence, now identified and covered by Law 17/2020, to provide ourselves with effective instruments to combat it in all its forms. An example of this is the new protocol for gender-based violence in Catalonia, which aims to structure the action circuits, involving both the local commissions and the National Commission.

Confronting all these forms of gender-based violence presents us with a major challenge: that of acting structurally and preventively, with the support of the entire population everywhere, to ensure that women enjoy free, dignified lives, anywhere and in any sphere, and placing this at the heart of all democratic societies and their institutions.

For the sake of dignity, the task of ending the patriarchy and its sexist ideology lies in the hands of everyone in this society. We cannot ignore the need to activate and engage men's sense of responsibility, individually and collectively, to point out their

own and their peers' sexist behaviour and attitudes, and for them to distance themselves from them. We must disobey the mandates of the most traditional, dominant masculinity that very often feeds back into the social media and online world, and all other spheres of society. We need to create new references to construct thousands of responsible, free, egalitarian, diverse, inclusive and caring masculinities.

Only by doing this, by weaving alliances and understanding, will we be able to build a community fabric and network of resources that will provide a source of health and quality of life for all women and all oppressed groups in society. We need to spread the culture of affection and care, we need secure, respectful, loving bonds in all areas of our lives. As bell hooks says, 'by always thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling, to accept the responsibility to love, to love out of freedom, equality and respect.

For a life free of gender-based violence!

