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PAM calls for urgent action to combat the surge in domestic violence

It is unfortunately and widely known that, in times of crisis, violence against women, girls and children is likely to increase.

Governments and media reports from PAM region are now consistent in indicating that since the outbreak of COVID-19, domestic violence has increased exponentially. Moreover, the increase in reports of domestic violence is happening at the same time when many national and community services to assist the victims of domestic violence are hampered by the limitations resulting from lockdowns and quarantine.

Members of governments, social services, experts and journalists are reporting that life-saving care and support to women, girls and children, who experienced different types of abuses (i.e. clinical management of rape/abuses and mental health and psycho-social support), have been affected due to many of the health service providers being overburdened themselves in handling COVID-19 cases. Even where basic essential services are still in place, in certain situations, a breakdown in or interruption of a coordinated response between different sectors, i.e., health, police and justice and social services response, and social distancing, means that the capacity of these sectors is limited in providing meaningful and relevant support to women, girls and children who are experiencing violence.

In other cases, where movement is restricted, and/or where access to quality essential services is limited, or being administered differently, as a result of social distancing (e.g. counselling by phone, emails or other platforms), requests for help have been either decreasing in some countries, or to the opposite multiplied. In countries facing disruption in social services, women, girls and children may not be able at all to reach those networks and organizations that normally provide support and recognize abuse (e.g. women's rights networks, teachers, health workers, faith leaders, community development officers, etc.).

The issue of raising domestic violence was debated in depth at 14th Plenary Session held in Athens at the end of February 2020, during the presentation of the report and resolution on "PAM MPs for Human Rights", prepared by Hon. Sandrine Morch (France). On that occasion PAM member States were invited to reflect on how to improve the current legislation and prosecution national practices to defeat and weaken violence against women, also in relation to Artificial Intelligence. Moreover, once the precautionary health measures connected to COVID 19 will be lifted, as decided by the President of the PAM 3rd Standing Committee on Human Rights, Hon Yana Ehm (Italy), a PAM dedicated meeting will focus on the role of parliamentarians on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

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Domestic violence has always been a priority for PAM, and the Assembly had dedicated a special session to this issue already at the 6th PAM Plenary Session in 2011 in Palermo, Italy, when its Special Task Force on Gender presented the Report on “Domestic Violence”, prepared by Hon. Maria Conceicao Pereira (Portugal). The resolution which was unanimously adopted by the Assembly on that occasion urged the PAM Member States to legislate to make domestic violence a public and criminal crime and to provide their legal, police and social bodies the human, technical and financial resources necessary to effectively combat all forms of domestic violence.

PAM also fully supports the [call](#) by the United Nations Secretary General for urgent action to combat the worldwide surge in domestic violence and to make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of member States’ national response plans for COVID-19, decisions that require a pro-active role for legislators.

UN Women has produced a [brief](#) which includes a set of recommendations to be considered by all sectors of society, from governments to international organizations and to civil society, in order to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, at the onset, during, and after the public health crisis, with examples of actions already taken. It also considers the economic impact in the long term of the pandemic and its implications for violence against women and girls, which global cost has previously been estimated at approximately USD 1.5 trillion

