
Violence against women: Pejcinovic Buric (CoE), “rape used as a weapon in Ukraine”. A call to join the Istanbul Convention

(Strasbourg) “Nine months to the day that war in Ukraine began, we read increasing reports of alleged war crimes, including sexual violence against women and girls. Sadly, history is repeating itself. Rape and other forms of sexual violence committed by combatants during armed conflict are as old as war itself”. Marija Pejčinović Burić, secretary general of the Council of Europe, makes a statement in the run-up to the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November). In war and violence, especially violence against women, she sees “a sombre note. But the tremendous assistance offered by many of our member states to millions of forcibly displaced people also gives us hope. Among over seven million refugees so far, 90% are women, girls and children, who are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and human trafficking. We must re-double our efforts to improve the assistance they are offered”. Pejčinović Burić then lists a number of commitments the international Community is making: preventing violence, protecting women and vulnerable children, supporting the victims, punishing the offenders. “That sexual violence in conflict zones is a global challenge is illustrated in contemporary reports of rape threats against female protestors in Iran for example. Open to countries worldwide, the Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention recognises this violence as a violation of essential human rights, as well as a form of discrimination against women. By providing guidelines to protect victims and punish perpetrators, including in wartime, the Istanbul Convention has become more important than ever, and I encourage countries worldwide to join it”.

Valentina Bombelli