
Resolution 1464 (2005)¹

Women and religion in Europe

1. In the lives of many European women, religion continues to play an important role. Whether they are believers or not, most women are affected in one way or another by the attitude of different faiths towards women, directly or through their traditional influence on society or the State.

2. This influence is seldom benign: women's rights are often curtailed or violated in the name of religion. While most religions teach equality of women and men before God, they attribute different roles to women and men on earth. Religiously motivated gender stereotypes have conferred upon men a sense of superiority which has led to discriminatory treatment of women by men and even violence at their hands.

3. At one end of the spectrum lie the extreme violations of women's human rights such as so-called "honour" crimes, forced marriages and female genital mutilation, which – although still rare in Europe – are on the rise in some communities.

4. At the other end are more subtle and less spectacular forms of intolerance and discrimination which are much more widespread in Europe – and which can be just as effective in achieving the subjection of women, such as the refusal to put into question a patriarchal culture which holds up the role of wife, mother and housewife as the ideal, and the refusal to adopt positive measures in favour of women (for example, in parliamentary elections).

5. All women living in Council of Europe member states have a right to equality and dignity in all areas of life. Freedom of religion cannot be accepted as a pretext to justify violations of women's rights, be they open or subtle, legal or illegal, practised with or without the nominal consent of the victims – women.

6. It is the duty of the member states of the Council of Europe to protect women against violations of their rights in the name of religion and to promote and fully implement gender equality. States must not accept any religious or cultural relativism of women's human rights. They must not agree to justify discrimination and inequality affecting women on grounds such as physical or biological differentiation based on or attributed to religion. They must fight against religiously motivated stereotypes of female and male roles from an early age, including in schools.

7. The Parliamentary Assembly thus calls on the member states of the Council of Europe to:

7.1. fully protect all women living in their country against all violations of their rights based on or attributed to religion by:

7.1.1. putting into place and enforcing specific and effective policies to fight all violations of women's right to life, to bodily integrity, freedom of movement and free choice of partner, including so-called "honour" crimes, forced marriage and female genital mutilation, wherever and by

whomever they are committed, however they are justified, and regardless of the nominal consent of the victim; this means that freedom of religion is limited by human rights;

7.1.2. refusing to recognise foreign family codes and personal status laws based on religious principles which violate women's rights, and ceasing to apply them on their own soil, renegotiating bilateral treaties if necessary;

7.2. take a stand against violations of women's human rights justified by religious or cultural relativism everywhere in the world, including in international fora such as the United Nations or the Inter-Parliamentary Union;

7.3. guarantee the separation between the Church and the State which is necessary to ensure that women are not subjected to religiously inspired policies and laws (for example, in the area of family, divorce, and abortion law);

7.4. ensure that freedom of religion and respect for culture and tradition are not accepted as pretexts to justify violations of women's rights, including when underage girls are forced to submit to religious codes (including dress codes), their freedom of movement is curtailed or their access to contraception is barred by their family or community;

7.5. where religious education is permitted in schools, ensure that this teaching is in conformity with gender equality principles;

7.6. take a stand against any religious doctrine which is antidemocratic or disrespectful of human rights, especially women's rights, and refuse to allow such doctrines to influence political decision making;

7.7. actively promote respect of women's rights, equality and dignity in all areas of life when engaging in dialogue with representatives of different religions, and work on achieving full gender equality in society.

1. *Assembly debate* on 4 October 2005 (26th Sitting) (see Doc. 10670, report of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Mrs Zapfl-Helbling).

Text adopted by the Assembly on 4 October 2005 (26th Sitting).