

OPEN LETTER OF DIPLOMATS IN SUPPORT OF WOMEN'S LEGAL RIGHTS IN ALBANIA

Ambassadors and senior representatives of international organizations in Albania, are pleased to note Albania's progress in promoting women's rights, culminating with the adoption of the Gender Equality Law, the Law on Protection from Discrimination, the Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations and the recent signing of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. The inclusion of a 30% gender quota in the Electoral Code is an encouraging step forward in enhancing women's political participation.

To further consolidate women's human rights, we encourage national authorities to ensure that criminal legislation does provide appropriate protection and legal redress to women survivors of violence. We remain deeply concerned by the official statistics demonstrating that 17 women were killed by their husbands over the past year. Of utmost importance in this regard is the need to criminalize both gender-based and domestic violence.

Despite the 30% quota for women's political participation, women's access to decision-making posts at both the national and local levels remains weak. With women representing only 16% of MPs, 12.4% of municipal and communal council members and only 7 out of 384 heads of local government unit, women cannot have a strong voice and effectively ensure that their interests and needs are properly addressed. A revisiting and strengthening of the existing gender quota system, in line with OSCE/ODIHR's recommendations, should help ensure that women's voices are heard.

Given that the Criminal Code and the Electoral Code will be reviewed by Parliament soon, we do hope that these concerns will be addressed and encourage Albania to pursue efforts to meet international standards set by the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, along with the harmonization of its legislation with EU *acquis* to ensure *de facto* equal opportunities for both men and women.

Signatories:

- Ms. Christine Moro**, Ambassador, Embassy of France 
- Ms. Carola Müller-Holtkemper**, Ambassador, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany 
- Ms. Yvana Enzler**, Ambassador, Embassy of Switzerland 
- Ms. Fiona McIlwham**, Ambassador, Her Britannic Majesty's Embassy of the United Kingdom 
- Ms. Zineb Touimi-Benjelloun**, UN Resident Coordinator, United Nations 
- Ms. Semia de Tapia**, Representative, UN Women 
- Ms. Kseniya Lvovsky**, Country Manager, the World Bank 
- Ms Astrid Wein**, Country Director, Austrian Technical Cooperation 
- Mr. Henk G.C. van den Dool**, Ambassador, Royal Netherlands' Embassy 
- Mr. Karsten Ankjaer Jensen**, Ambassador, Royal Danish Embassy 
- Mr. Ettore Sequi**, Ambassador/ Head of Delegation, Delegation of European Union 
- Mr. Eugen Wollfarth**, Head of Presence, OSCE 