



Statement by Soroptimist International of Europe

Latvia's Withdrawal from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, is a dangerous **"Push Back"** for Women's Rights and Equality in Europe.

Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE), representing nearly 30.000 European women across 43 countries, expresses deep concern and disappointment at the decision of the Latvian Parliament to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence — the Istanbul Convention.

This unprecedented step would make Latvia the first European Union Member State to renounce this landmark treaty — a comprehensive human rights instrument that protects women and girls from violence and holds governments accountable for ensuring their safety.

We recall that Latvia's human-rights obligations extend well beyond the Istanbul Convention. Latvia is a State Party to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and other core United Nations human-rights treaties. The decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention therefore weakens not only specific protections for women and girls but also the coherence and integrity of Latvia's broader treaty-based human-rights commitments.

Latvia's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention only one year after ratification, creates a profound legal and political inconsistency. As an EU Member State, Latvia remains legally bound to transpose and implement the EU Directive (EU)2024/1385 on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, adopted in 2024 — a directive that is explicitly grounded in the principles and definitions of the Istanbul Convention.

Moreover, the European Union itself is a Party of the Istanbul Convention, having ratified it on 28th June 2023. This means that regardless of a Member State's withdrawal, EU law and obligations deriving from the Convention still apply in areas of EU competence.

The Istanbul Convention is not ideological; it is a lifeline for women and a commitment to equality, justice, and peace. Turning away from it undermines the rule of law, weakens democratic values, and sends a dangerous message that hard-won rights can be reversed.

As Soroptimists, we believe that preventing violence also means challenging the root causes — the harmful stereotypes and traditional gender roles that continue to divide our societies and normalise inequality. We must raise awareness, provide accurate data, and promote understanding to confront discrimination, intolerance, and unequal treatment. These efforts are not only essential for ending violence against women —



they are fundamental to a SUSTAINABLE FUTURE where peace, stability, and international security are embodied.

We call on the members of the Latvian Parliament – *Saeima* - to reconsider their position and to honour their commitment to the Istanbul Convention. We urge all European governments to reaffirm their support for this vital instrument and to stand united in defending women's rights and gender equality.

Violence against women is not a private issue — it is a violation of human rights and a threat to democracy. We will not remain silent. We will continue to advocate, educate, and act — for safety, for equality, and for peace.

The Istanbul Convention remains as the strongest and most comprehensive legal safeguard for all women's human rights to live a life free from violence. Now it is the time for all States to uphold – not abandon – this vital commitment.