

**Head of Presence's remarks at the launch of Days Against Domestic Violence**  
*Korça, 5 June 2014*

Distinguished guests, dear ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to launch today an important initiative of the OSCE Presence and the Albanian State Police: a campaign against domestic violence in Albania. We are particularly pleased to have the first stop in this campaign in the beautiful town of Korça.

I would like to express our appreciation to the Mayor of Korça and the Korça Police Directorate for hosting this event.

This campaign is an extension of the awareness-raising work we have been conducting over the past months with students throughout Albania. It involves students and police officers, as well as parliamentarians, NGOs, social workers and health professionals, in a series of activities that seek to raise citizens' awareness about domestic violence – what it is, who can assist, and what to do if they or someone they know is a victim.

Domestic violence is not just physical abuse – hitting or kicking – but also includes insults, threats of physical harm, rape and a range of controlling behaviours. Women are the primary – but not the only – victims. Children and men can also be the targets of domestic violence.

According to an INSTAT survey from 2013, nearly 60% of Albanian women surveyed have been the victims of domestic violence at some point in their lives; 53% were “currently” in an abusive relationship.<sup>1</sup> Only 8% of these women sought help.

Domestic violence may happen mainly behind closed doors, but it is not a private, family matter. It is immoral and illegal. Each and every one of us has an obligation to do whatever we can to prevent this type of violence, to enable victims to get the help and protection they need, and to ensure these crimes are prosecuted.

Albania has a legal framework in place to assist victims, to protect them while helping them rebuild their lives. There are a number of structures and authorities who can aid those affected by domestic violence. Some of them, such as the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, Ministry of Interior and the State Police, are here with us today. Like the OSCE Presence, they are all committed to preventing and ending violence in the family.

As an expression of that commitment, the Presence developed a practical handbook for victims of domestic violence, to help those who work with victims, and to assist victims in getting help, protection and justice. The handbook has been in use for over six years now.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.instat.gov.al/media/225815/domestic\\_violence\\_in\\_albania\\_2013.pdf](http://www.instat.gov.al/media/225815/domestic_violence_in_albania_2013.pdf)

However, it is important to underline the fact that domestic violence cannot be addressed through legal means alone. This is not the job solely of the police and the courts. We must change the mentality that accepts violence against women and children. We must reject utterly the idea that tradition, or culture, makes certain unacceptable behaviours somehow more natural.

The culture of silence must end, now.