



The Council of Europe's new Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence was opened for signature 11 May on the occasion of the 121st Session of the Committee of Ministers taking place in Istanbul, gathering Ministers of Foreign Affairs from 47 Member States.

Thirteen countries signed the new Convention in Istanbul.

This new landmark Council of Europe treaty is the first legally binding instrument in the world creating a comprehensive legal framework to protect women against all forms of violence, and prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence.

It defines and criminalizes various forms of violence against women (including forced marriage, female genital mutilation, stalking, physical and psychological violence and sexual violence).

Signatories will have to provide helplines, shelters, medical care and legal aid for women who have suffered rape or other forms of violence. The Convention also establishes an international mechanism to monitor its implementation at national level.

"The Convention is the next step in a body of work by the Council of Europe that has driven moves to equality since the 1970s," according to Council of Europe Secretary-General Thorbjörn Jagland. "My hope is that not only will it give practical ways to bring millions of women out of the violence trap; it will put equality back on the agenda."

The following countries signed the new Convention during a ceremony held 11 May in Istanbul: Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. The Convention is also open to accession by non-European countries and by the European Union.