

# Inter-American Convention on the **Prevention, Punishment and Eradication** of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará)



Organization of  
American States



Canadian International  
Development Agency



“The **States Parties** **condemn** all forms of **violence against** women and **agree** to **pursue**, by all **appropriate** means and without delay, **policies** to prevent, **punish** and **eradicate** such **violence...**”



## Political will to fight violence against women

Through the Belém do Pará Convention, the States Party agreed that violence against women:

“...constitutes a violation of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and impairs or nullifies the observance, enjoyment and exercise of such rights and freedoms”

“...is an offense against human dignity and a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men”

“...pervades every sector of society regardless of class, race or ethnic group, income, culture, level of education, age or religion and strikes at its very foundations”

For the first time, the Belém do Pará Convention establishes women’s right to live a life free of violence. This inter-American human rights treaty has served as the basis for the adoption of laws and policies on prevention, eradication and punishment of violence against women in its States Party, as well as the formulation of national plans, the organization of campaigns and the implementation of care protocols and services, among other initiatives. The Convention has made a significant contribution to strengthening the Inter-American Human Rights System.

## How is violence against women defined?

In Article 1, the Convention defines violence against women as “...any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere.”

Article 2 recognizes three types of violence:

1. Physical violence
2. Sexual violence
3. Psychological violence

The Convention also highlights three spheres where this violence takes place:

### 1. In private life

Violence that occurs within the family or domestic unit or within any other interpersonal relationship, even when the perpetrator no longer lives with the victim.

### 2. In public life

Violence that is perpetrated by any person and occurs in the community, in the workplace, in educational institutions, health facilities or any other place; and

### 3. Violence that is perpetrated or condoned by the state or its agents regardless of where it occurs

#### Which rights does the Convention recognize and protect?

The rights established by the Convention are listed in Articles 3 to 6.

Every woman has the right to be free from violence in both the public and private spheres.

These rights include, among others:

- » The right of women to be free from all forms of discrimination;
- » The right of women to be valued and educated free of stereotyped patterns of behavior and social and cultural practices based on concepts of inferiority or subordination.

Every woman is entitled to the free and full exercise of her civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as embodied in regional and international instruments on human rights.

These rights include, among others:

- » The right to have her life respected;
- » The right to have her physical, mental and moral integrity respected;
- » The right to personal liberty and security;
- » The right not to be subjected to torture;
- » The right to have the inherent dignity of her person respected and her family protected;
- » The right to equal protection before the law and of the law;
- » The right to simple and prompt recourse to a competent court for protection against acts that violate her rights;
- » The right to associate freely;
- » The right of freedom to profess her religion and beliefs within the law; and
- » The right to have equal access to the public service of her country and to take part in the conduct of public affairs, including decision-making



The obligations to which the States Party to this Convention have committed are:

- » Refrain from engaging in any act or practice of violence against women and ensure that their agents comply with this obligation;
- » Apply due diligence to prevent, investigate and impose penalties for violence against women;
- » Include in their domestic legislation and policy, provisions that will ensure compliance with the objectives of the Convention;
- » Adopt legal measures that effectively protect women from their abusers;
- » Amend or repeal existing legal norms practices that perpetuate violence against women;
- » Establish legal procedures that ensure that women who have been subjected to violence have access to justice and due process;
- » Ensure that women subjected to violence have effective access to restitution, reparations or other remedies;
- » Promote awareness and observance of the right of women to be free from violence;
- » Modify social and cultural patterns of behaviour of men and women, eliminating educational practices that reinforce ideas, attitudes and stereotypes on men and women that perpetuate violence against women;
- » Promote the education and training of State agents charged with applying the law and policies on prevention, punishment and eradication of violence against women;
- » Provide appropriate specialized services for women who have been subjected to violence;
- » Promote and support education programs designed to raise the awareness of the public on violence against women;
- » Provide women who are subjected to violence with access to effective readjustment and training programs to enable them to fully participate in public, private and social life;
- » Encourage communication media to develop appropriate media guidelines that contribute to the eradication of violence against women;
- » Ensure research and the gathering of statistics and other relevant information that increases the visibility of the violence suffered by women; and
- » Foster international cooperation for the exchange of ideas and experiences.

## What inter-American protection mechanisms are contemplated by the Convention?

### 1. National reports

The States Party must include in their national reports to the Inter-American Commission of Women information on:

- » measures adopted to prevent and prohibit violence against women,
- » measures adopted to assist women affected by violence,
- » any difficulties they observe in applying those measures, and
- » factors that contribute to violence against women.

In 2004, the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention – MESECVI – was created on the basis of these national reports, in which the States Party can highlight their progress in the implementation of the Convention.

For more information on the MESECVI, visit: <http://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi>

### 2. Advisory opinions from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights

The States Party and the Inter-American Commission of Women may request advisory opinions on the interpretation of the Convention from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. To-date, this mechanism has not been utilized.

### 3. Denunciations or complaints before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR)

The IACHR may receive denunciations or complaints from either individuals or non-governmental entities of violations of Article 7 of the Convention.

“The **States Parties** agree to **undertake** progressively specific **measures to promote awareness** and **observance of the right of women to be free from violence**, and the right of women to have their **human rights respected** and **protected**”



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