

Action needed

Violence against women and inequality of opportunity is unacceptable and EU decision makers must take action to tackle this problem, argues **Sirpa Pietikäinen**

Sirpa Pietikäinen is a member of parliament's women's rights and gender equality committee and co-host of the vagina monologues performance in the European parliament

In recent years, the EU has made numerous commitments to end violence against women and I am proud to have been part of this progress. But the extent and impact of violence against women, in Europe and beyond, remains staggering compared to the few concrete actions that have actually been taken to end it.

On Tuesday 6 March 2012, two days before international women's day, I will join eight fellow MEPs to perform the vagina monologues in the European parliament. It is being organised as part of the global v-day campaign to end violence against women and girls. This world-renowned work draws from the results of over 200 interviews with women about their bodies and their sexuality. It allows women who hear the stories to know that they are not alone in their own experience. It inspires people – women and men – to get involved in V-Day and to stop violence against women and girls. It removes the shame often associated with the word vagina and the vagina

itself; instead it celebrates the word and celebrates women. Eve Ensler, the monologues' author, will also be present.

The MEPs (perhaps I should say actors - I'll let you decide) come from across the political spectrum, and our message will be that violence against women is unacceptable; that it must be stopped and that EU decision makers must act decisively to ensure that this happens. We will also be presenting eight actions for MEPs to undertake if they support our cause.

In Europe, we are proud of the progress we have made in bringing about gender equality and ensuring that the world is safe for women. But this task is far from complete. In the European Union, gender-based violence is still one of the main causes of death among women. Half a million girls and women who live in the EU have been subjected to female genital mutilation. And in several European countries, as well as outside Europe, the right of each woman to make the deeply personal decision about whether to undergo an abortion is also severely limited.

Meanwhile, across the developing world the challenges and injustices facing women at home, at school, at work, in public life and in their sex lives are still numerous and deeply rooted. In the developing world, 70 per cent of children out of school are female, over 200 million women lack access to modern contraception, and far more still are robbed of the right to decide over their future. Sexual violence in wars is proliferating, destroying women's bodies, lives and entire communities.

The stars-to-be who have signed up to join me for this vital cause are Franziska Brantner, Isabelle Durant and Ulrike Lunacek from the Greens; Ana Maria Gomes from the Socialists and Democrats; Marielle Gallo from my group, the European People's Party; Renate Weber and Cecilia Wikström from the Liberals; and Kartika Tamara Liotard from GUE/NGL. The V in V-Day already stands for Victory, Valentine and Vagina. Please come and join us on 6 March at 18:30 in the Yehudi Menuhin space. ★



"In the European Union, gender-based violence is still one of the main causes of death among women"