

Polish bishops rap Europe norms against violence to women as interference

by [Jonathan Luxmoore](#) in the [August 8, 2012](#) issue

Poland's Roman Catholic Bishops Conference has denounced a Council of Europe convention prohibiting violence against women and urged the country's liberal government not to sign it.

"Although this convention focuses on the important problem of violence toward women, it is built on untruthful ideological assumptions which can in no way be accepted," the bishops said in a declaration July 9. "It mixes the proper principle of antiviolence with an attempt to interfere dangerously with our system of upbringing, and with values accepted by millions of Poles. This is a very worrying signal."

The bishops spoke out as the center-right government of the premier Donald Tusk prepared to sign the April 2011 "convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence," which creates the world's first comprehensive legal framework for curbing psychological and sexual violence, protecting victims and ending impunity for perpetrators.

They said the Tusk government had broken pledges to allow a public debate on the convention and had consulted "only women with leftist views" while ignoring pro-life and family groups.

The bishops added that the document erred in defining sexual differences as "socially constructed" and in "totally ignoring natural biological differences between men and women" and had caused "special concern" by appearing to "promote homosexuality and transsexuality."

The convention "suggests violence toward women is systemic and has roots in religion, tradition and culture, and it commits signatories to struggle against the achievements of civilization," notes a statement from the Bishops Conference.

“Polish law has enough tools for resisting instances of violence, including aggression toward women.”

The 81-article convention, signed so far by 20 of the Council of Europe’s 47 member states, criminalizes forced marriages, female genital mutilation and stalking. It also describes violence against women as “a manifestation of historically unequal power relations.”

The document commits signatory states to “promote changes in social and cultural patterns of behavior” with a view to eradicating “prejudices, customs and traditions” based on the notion of women’s inferiority, as well as to ensure that “culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called honor” are not used to justify violence.

In June 2010, Polish members of parliament defied the church and approved a national law against violence in families, which tightened rules against smacking and corporal punishment, despite warnings by the Bishops Conference president, Archbishop Józef Michalik, that the measure would “disturb the natural order” and undermine parental control. —ENInews