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**Co-operation is the key –
the Action Plan of the Federal Government as a central control tool in the protection of
women and children from violence**

1. The background, central idea and cornerstones of the Action Plan

On 27th September 2007, the Federal Government already adopted the Second Action Plan to combat violence against women. The first such action plan had been adopted by the

plans in the meantime or, on a smaller scale, have adopted catalogues of measures on the topic of violence against women.

2. Developments and changes in the area of domestic violence which have been initiated and implemented thanks to the action plan

It is precisely in the area of domestic violence that it is possible to clearly demonstrate the developments in the cultural, political, legal and social understanding of this violence - developments which have been encouraged by the Action Plan and which have led, in Germany, to a decisively positive change in practical action and intervention. I would like to briefly outline this development in relation to the Action Plan in its role as initiator and steering instrument.

If we were to go back thirty years, domestic violence was not at all a topic of discussion in Germany. It did not become one until 1975. There was no official data about the type, degree and consequences of violence perpetrated by a partner; even in private, it was (or often only thought to be) a well-kept secret. Injuries were concealed and often explained away as accidents; neighbours and family members who noticed something supported the taboo and only rarely offered help. It was only in the context of the International Women's Year in 1975 that 'what was private became political' and with it also the issue of domestic violence against women.

At the outset, the daily violence against women was the preserve of the women's movement and projects for women, but later it became part of government policy for women. In **1976**, the **first shelter for women** in Germany was founded in Berlin as a pilot project of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs and the Berlin Senate. The continuous scientific evaluation was conducted by Prof. Carol Hagemann-White and Prof. Dr. Barbara Kavemann who, even today, still essentially work on the scientific aspects of violence against women. Their final report entitled: 'Assistance for Abused Women' (*Hilfe für misshandelte Frauen*) which was published by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs in 1981, became an important agenda for the women's movement. The recommendations and demands contained in that report have been implemented in the course of the past 20 years in Germany, most recently in 2002 with the entry into force of the so-called Protection against Violence Act.

Thereafter, **additional shelters for women were founded** in the cities and then also in the rural areas. This trend was also reinforced by the reunification process. After the fall of the wall and the subsequent reunification, the first shelters for women were set up in quick succession in the new Federal Länder at the beginning of the Nineties. Originally, they were sponsored by corresponding start-up funds from the Federal Government supplemented by municipal funds. Today, there are over 400 shelters and flats that provide refuge for women in Germany – giving the country, internationally, one of the best rankings when it comes to providing shelters for women.

The **end of the Eighties** brought stagnation to this development in Germany. Although the shelters for women were increasingly being seen as a part of the social network, the problem – violence against women – was, unfortunately, 'normalised' as a result. With the supply of shelters for women, those affected now had aid opportunities at their disposal. The result was that, predominantly, the other institutions no longer felt responsible for the subject.

It was at the end of the Eighties, with the 'discovery' of successful projects in the USA and Australia that the development of new strategies received a decisive fillip. The Ministry for Family Affairs commissioned a study on the transferability of the American co-operation concept against domestic violence – DAIP – to Germany. The **idea behind these co-operation and intervention projects** was the subject of lively debate in Germany. It took several years for the time to be ripe for such a cooperative pragmatic approach for the implementation of which both the women's support organisations and the state-run institutions were prepared.

In **1995**, the **first German co-operation and intervention project against domestic violence – BIG** – became operative in Berlin. It was and continues to be a resounding success.

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- the victim's safety takes priority and is the central starting point of the intervention.

This modified approach pursued by the intervention projects led to a number of important statutory amendments at federal and Land level, creating better possibilities for personal protection orders against the perpetrator – eviction and orders prohibiting a return to or entry of the victims' home and immediate social environment.

These steps constitute some of the **central measures of the first Action Plan of the Federal Government to combat violence against women of 1999**. Others were:

- the above-mentioned federal pilot project, the 'Berlin Intervention Project against Domestic Violence' (BIG) which, for the first time successfully linked police, criminal law, civil law and psychosocial measures on the ground and served as an example for many other projects of this type;
- the continuous scientific evaluation of 10 different intervention projects against domestic violence in Germany. The resulting findings have become an important basis for decision-making in the Laender and municipalities planning and seeking to introduce similar projects and for those which have already done so;
- the Act on the Non-Violent Upbringing of Children, which entered into force in November 2000, and which prohibits all types of violence against children. To accompany its introduction, a nationwide campaign was conducted. The evaluations carried out in recent years prove that the Act has led to a change in awareness in the population. The use of violence in child-raising is rejected more clearly nowadays and is not resorted to as much.
- The Protection against Violence Act ('Act to improve civil law protection in cases of acts of violence and stalking as well as to facilitate the surrender of the marital home in the event of a separation') which entered into force in January 2002 and contains a clear legal basis for the issuing of personal protection orders by the civil courts such as prohibiting the perpetrator from contacting, coming close to or harassing a person. The evaluation conducted on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Justice shows that the Act is being used by women who are victims of violence. Most of the 16 Federal Laender, which are responsible for the police force have, in consequence, extended their police laws so that the police also have improved possibilities for enforcing an order of eviction or exclusion from the shared residence against the perpetrator.

- the first representative study "Health, Well-Being and Personal Safety of Women in Germany" (

the data base through a representative study on violence against disabled women and, in schools, we are currently sponsoring prevention measures against domestic violence.

My conclusion is that, in Germany, the Action Plan has become a **platform, both strategically and in respect of content, a tool** which we can use and further develop in order to achieve a well-grounded, practice-oriented anti-violence policy with the aim of arriving at binding state action in this area.

With this plan, the German Government expects that the 16 German Land governments and the myriad municipalities will likewise continue and intensify their activities to combat violence against women and that the collaboration between public agencies, and non-governmental organisations and/or associations, will effectively support the objectives of the Second Action Plan.

With this Action Plan, our aim is also to send out a **signal to society**. Alongside the improvements in protection, it is, above all, a question of strengthening women and children so that they can lead a life free of violence and stand up for their rights. It is also about encouraging as many people as possible to refuse to tolerate violence and take an active step towards avoiding and combating it.