

# Signing of the Government of Catalonia–Universities agreement for the victims of gender-based violence

## Palau de la Generalitat, Barcelona

Honourable councillors, president of the Catalan Women's Institute, general secretaries, Secretary for Universities, presidents,

By the end of the last century, gender-based violence began to break the bell jar in which it was trapped.

It was around then when forensic physician Miguel Lorente, after having treated thousands of victims, published a book with a horrifying title.

The title quoted a sentence that, in his own professional experience, he most frequently heard repeated by women who had suffered gender-based violence: *Mi marido me pega lo normal* (My husband hits me no more than normal)<sup>1</sup>.

This response is a perfect illustration of how violence against women was (and is) historically integrated, socialized and normalized.

I say was because we have undoubtedly advanced, as shown by the agreement we are signing today between the Government of Catalonia and the Catalan universities.

But I also say is because there are still people who talk but fail to act; who condemn, but go no further.

This was expressed in the habitually forceful manner by the Basque activist Irantzu Varela: "We still hear this powerfully anaesthetic discourse on the 'scourge' of gender-based violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Miguel Lorente, *Mi marido me pega lo normal. Agresión a la mujer: realidades y mitos*, Barcelona. The first edition was published by Crítica in 2000. It has recently been published in pocket edition by Booket.

As if it were plague of unknown origin, that no one can explain and which no one knows how to combat”<sup>2</sup>

Thus there is a need to evolve, to accept the gravity of the problem, to promote courageous public policies, to raise awareness in society, to stare into the abyss.

Anyone who has looked over a cliff will have felt that double vertigo in the pit of their stomach, a mixture of fascination and fear.



*«When we stare into the abyss of gender-based violence we also note this mixture of feelings: satisfaction at having adopted measures in the right direction, such as today, and the dissatisfaction of not yet having done enough, because there is still more to do.»*

When we stare into the abyss of gender-based violence we also note this mixture of feelings: satisfaction at having adopted measures in the right direction, such as today, and the dissatisfaction of not yet having done enough, because there is still more to do.

Overcoming this abyss is everyone’s obligation.

And there can be no excuses; not from individuals, groups, the government or universities. We must accept our share of responsibility.

Because when we talk about our transformative role, we must also talk about combating this abyss through the daily example of our behaviour, through our responsibility for training future generations.

This week, journalist Lucía Méndez titled her column “Let’s speak plainly” and launched a fully justified attack on those who seem to feel nostalgia for a time when “my husband hits me no more than normal” or “I killed her because she was mine”<sup>3</sup>

According to Lucía Méndez, “there is no gender ideology. [...] We are talking about guaranteeing human rights, not nerdy internet arguments about feminism and Adam’s rib”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Irantzu Varela, “Por qué nos matan y no pasa nada”, on Vice.com, 2 October 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Translation of “La maté porque era mía” the Spanish title of the 1993 film *Tango* directed by Patrice Leconte.

<sup>4</sup> Lucía Méndez, “Vamos a hablar claro”, *El Mundo*, 5 January 2019, <https://www.elmundo.es/opinion/2019/01/05/5c2fa4ecfc6c83f7328b461c.html>.

Demonstrating the truth of her argument, the UN sustainable development goals include, in points 4 and 5, quality education and gender equality.

Because these are essential elements, but ones that are hard to achieve by the deadline of the 2030 Agenda without “guaranteeing inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

Because we are generators, hubs and spreaders of knowledge.

Because, as I said before, it is up to us to educate tomorrow’s generations, but even more importantly, to educate the educators.

The future of the country begins in the classrooms, both on-site and online, of our twelve universities.

And I have mentioned two of the SDGs (sustainable development goals), but I could have mentioned all of them. Because they all demand action from us as universities and as the Catalan university system.

It is not a question of public or private, but of the future, of citizenry and knowledge, of truly acting as agents for social transformation.

As the Secretary for Universities and Research, Dr Xavier Grau, saw three years ago in the GUNI, we as a system have a marvellous opportunity open to us, as long as we remain capable of adopting the 2030 Agenda to guide us in teaching, research and transfer, and allow it to spur us on in turning the famous expression around: to “think locally and act globally”.

Adopting it as universities, adopting it as a system and adopting it in government.

Despite the partisan opinions of some, we are moving in the right direction.

However, for the sake of speaking plainly, let’s make no mistake: all these measures are also evidence of failure or, to express it in a more positive light, proof that we need to persist to eradicate gender-based violence.

And have no doubt, we will persist.



Thank you very much.