

Press Statement

Paulina Dembska's femicide a wake-up call to address gender inequality in our society

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) expresses its sorrow and outrage at the femicide of Paulina Dembska.

Paulina Dembska was sexually abused and murdered, allegedly by a man unknown and unrelated to her, while feeding cats in Sliema. This is clearly a case of violence against women, that is, violence that took place because Paulina "was a woman". The possibility that the alleged perpetrator suffers from mental health issues in no way erases the misogynist motive behind the murder or provides an excuse for it.

Women know too well the range of different forms of harassment and abuse they experience whilst frequenting public places and getting on with their daily life. Although Paulina's murder is the most extreme form of power and control in a patriarchal society, manifestations of this mentality – from catcalling and unwanted touching, to sexist media representations and trivialization of harassment experienced by women and girls – are all around us to see.

The femicide of Paulina Dembska should serve as a wake-up call to seriously examine and address the unequal power relations between women and men in our society. This entails a concerted effort from all sectors and authorities, and from all citizens and residents, both women and men. Gender inequality needs addressing through gender-sensitive policy making and policing as well as the eradication of sexism from all spheres of life, including online and broadcast media as well as institutionalised sexism. Moreover, gender equality should be integrated in all forms of formal and informal education, and effective educational tools should be developed to aid this process.

The term 'femicide' draws our attention to the fact that responsibility for such a heinous crime lies also in the social context that enables this gender-based violence. Public and private spaces that are equally safe for women and men can only be developed through actively challenging the diverse forms of gender inequality in the different spheres of society.

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