**Motion *re* Adopting a Zero Tolerance Approach to Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence**

That Dáil Éireann

commends:

* Natasha O’Brien, Bláthnaid Raleigh, the Women of Honour, women in the Football Association of Ireland and all of the women whose bravery in speaking out about domestic, sexual and gender-based violence has shone a spotlight on this insidious crime and highlighted the need for radical reform.

notes that:

* Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence is an epidemic in our society.
* Last month, Women’s Aid revealed it had received more than 40,000 disclosures of abuse against women and children in 2023 – the highest number in its 50-year history.
* A comprehensive and nationally representative CSO Sexual Violence Survey, published in 2023, revealed 40 percent of respondents experienced sexual violence in their lifetime – 52 percent of women and 28 percent of men.
* Nearly 80 percent of those who experienced sexual violence knew the perpetrator while fewer than half told anyone about it.
* The survey also revealed that rates of reporting to Gardaí are incredibly low with just 5 percent of adults who experienced sexual violence reporting the crime.
* Of those who did not disclose abuse to Gardaí, 60 percent said it was because they did not think the abuse was serious enough while one-third did not do so because they felt ashamed or embarrassed.
* In 2021, the Rape Crisis Centre revealed that just 14 percent of rapes reported to Gardaí actually result in a prosecution.
* In 2022, the Government published the third national strategy on domestic, sexual and gender-based violence and said it was adopting a “zero tolerance” approach.
* In the Dáil, on June 25 2024, Taoiseach Simon Harris said: “We need to have a zero tolerance strategy embedded in everything we do.”

further notes that:

* In June 2024, a member of the Defence Forces walked free from court after he received a suspended sentence for a brutal assault on Natasha O’Brien. The DPP has now appealed the leniency of that sentence.
* After that conviction, the Defence Forces revealed 68 serving members have been convicted of crimes or are before the courts charged with criminal offences.
* According to the Tánaiste, of these 68, “approximately five relate to sexual assault and one is pending”; while six cases relate to “domestic incidents or breaches of barring orders”.
* On July 1 2024, it was revealed that a taxi driver, who was convicted of raping two young women he had picked up in his cab, had separate previous convictions for serious sexual offences.
* In May 2024, Registrar of the Dental Council of Ireland, Dr David O’Flynn, told the Oireachtas Committee on Health that gaps in the current regulatory framework for dentists meant an unregistered dentist, operating in this jurisdiction despite having a conviction for sexual assault, could not be sanctioned.
* The Dental Council of Ireland have called on successive governments to update the regulatory framework, advising, in a submission to government in 2021, that “patient safety cannot be assured and patients have been harmed because of this failure to regulate”.
* Counselling and psychotherapy services in Ireland are completely unregulated, with the Health Minister advising the Dáil, in May 2024, that “it is not possible to say with any degree of accuracy when the professions of counsellor and psychotherapist will be fully regulated”.

expresses concern that:

* Too often, it takes women speaking out about their own trauma and experience of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence before State institutions or the Government take any action.
* The slow pace of reform evident in many areas – including the huge shortage in refuge spaces, endemic problems in our criminal justice system; and a failure to regulate, or adequately regulate, a variety professions - despite the Government’s professed “zero tolerance” approach to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.

calls on government to:

* Update the Dáil on when sentencing guidelines from the Judicial Council will finally be published.
* Clarify when the report of Peter Ward SC, into the administration of cases involving Defence Forces personnel charged or convicted of criminal offences, will be completed and published.
* Advise when Defence Forces personnel, who have been convicted of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, will be dismissed.
* Review taxi regulations, including the power of An Garda Siochána to revoke or suspend a SPSV licence, the operation of those powers, and whether they are sufficient.
* Update the Dentists Act (1985) so the Dental Council of Ireland will be able to, among other things, sanction unregistered dentists operating in Ireland despite having convictions, including for sexual assault.
* Introduce regulations for counselling and psychotherapy services – which many vulnerable people rely on.
* Increase refuge space so Ireland is in line with our obligations under the Istanbul Convention; include the numbers staying in women’s refuges in the homeless figures; and increase the provision of secure alternative housing for those in refuges.
* Explain how a failure by Government to review, introduce or update professional regulations, over many years, is evidence of a “zero tolerance” approach to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence.