



International  
Women's Day  
2021



## PATHWAYS TO AN EQUAL FUTURE: WOMEN INSPIRING CHANGE

Proceedings of the online panel held on 8 March 2021  
and Lessons Learned



**GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE**  
مركز جنيف لحقوق الإنسان والحوار العالمي  
**CENTRE DE GENÈVE POUR LA PROMOTION DES DROITS DE L'HOMME ET LE DIALOGUE GLOBAL**

In Special Consultative Status with the United Nations

ذو مركز استشاري خاص لدى الأمم المتحدة

Doté du statut consultatif auprès des Nations Unies





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Published in 2021

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ISBN: 978-2-940639-06-9



The Geneva Centre for Human Rights  
Advancement and Global Dialogue

## **PATHWAYS TO AN EQUAL FUTURE: WOMEN INSPIRING CHANGE**

GENEVA, MARCH 2021

## **List of abbreviations**

CEDAW:	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSW:	Commission on the Status of Women
HRC:	Human Rights Council
IWD:	International Women's Day
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
UN:	United Nations
UDHR:	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund

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## FOREWORD

The present publication is the fruit of an online panel debate organized by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue on 8 March 2021 to commemorate International Women's Day. This is a day when women are universally recognized for their achievements and contributions in all walks of life, without regard to divisions, whether national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political. The UN celebrated the first official International Women's Day on 8 March 1975.

The panel, entitled "Pathways To An Equal Future: Women Inspiring Change", in its presentations by panellists and the ensuing debates, addressed a host of crucial and contemporary issues in relation with this theme, such as gender-based violence, women's leadership and empowerment, early marriages, gender equality, the role of education, among others. Many of these reflect the underlying essence of the Sustainable Development Goals. The panel presentations and debates converged to state that women are hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, which however provides an opportunity for radical, positive action to redress long-standing inequalities and injustice. Hence the urgent need to put women and girls at the centre of recovery efforts, in well-deserved recognition of their role as true architects of society, vital to building a better and more resilient future for communities across the world.

The Geneva Centre considers itself very fortunate to have been able to benefit from the irreplaceable field experience and remarkable expertise of eight renowned panellists from across the world, to whom it take this opportunity to extend its sincere gratitude.

The book includes, besides a summary of the proceedings, the full statements of the panel presentations as well as written contributions, an analytical article which builds upon the lessons learned from the panel. This article provides an overview of the existing international legal and institutional framework for the protection of women's rights, identifies the wide-ranging impact of the pandemic thereupon, and offers a ten-point road map for the effective promotion of women's rights.

The Geneva Centre wishes to reiterate its commitment to support attainment of this goal, within the framework of its mission, through continuing efforts in terms of advocacy, dissemination of best practices, training and national capacity building.

**by Dr Umesh Palwankar**

*Executive Director of the Geneva Centre for  
Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue*





## **SUMMARY RECORD<sup>1</sup> OF THE PANEL MEETING**

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1. The present report provides a summary record drawn up by the Geneva Centre on the discussions which took place during the panel meeting. It does not commit the authors of the remarks themselves, whose statements are reproduced in the annex of this publication.



## INTRODUCTION

Despite the increased awareness about women's rights in many countries and significant progress made in recent decades, a number of old and new obstacles remain on women's path to equality and justice. Women all over the world are still over-represented in lower-paid jobs or get lower salaries than men for equal jobs. They often remain sidelined in political and economic decision-making. Many are not free with regard to their own bodies, yet others suffer abuses of their physical and moral integrity and harassment in their everyday life. This is irreconcilable with human rights and a vision of equality and dignity for all.

The global pandemic has only exacerbated the challenges that women face. "Limited gains in gender equality and women's rights made over the decades are in danger of being rolled back due to the COVID-19 pandemic," said the UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

On the occasion of the International Women's Day (IWD) on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (hereinafter "the Geneva Centre") held a virtual event to celebrate the commitment, the courage and the determination of millions of ordinary women and men who do extraordinary things in order to promote a society based on gender equality and respect for women's rights, who choose to challenge stereotypes, fight bias and broaden perceptions. Beyond this, the event aimed to honour women who are the true architects of society, to promote their empowerment for them to play a crucial role in shaping the world and in building a better future for all.

The panel was moderated by the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre, Dr Umesh Palwankar, who made opening remarks. The panelists included eight speakers from different geographical regions and professional backgrounds, who shared their own experience in promoting girls' and women's leadership, as well as combatting gender-based violence, modern slavery, human trafficking and early marriages. The speakers expanded on the significance of the right to education, the importance of childhood and the role of working with the governments for creating new policies.

The event, based upon the official IWD 2021 theme "Choose to Challenge", was part of the International Women's Day celebrations and was featured on the dedicated global platform <https://www.internationalwomensday.com>.

## OPENING REMARKS

**Dr Umesh Palwankar**, *Executive Director of the Geneva Centre*



*It is a great pleasure to have on board the panelists who were kind enough to accept our invitation and speak, as well as all the other participants from across the globe. It is a really international event. The most important thing in this panel is to give the floor to the panelists and to the participants, so I will make my introductory remarks short.*

*Just a couple of words about the Geneva Centre, which was founded in 2013 and is an independent human rights think-tank, whose work rests on four pillars: research and publication, training of stakeholders and national capacity building in the field of human rights in specific focus areas. The fourth pillar is cross-cutting and consists of the promotion of human rights globally, through international advocacy and inter-cultural and inter-civilizational dialogue.*

*The present panel event is one of the ways we do this. It involves two pillars: research and publication, and international advocacy. Research and publication because the panelists' statements will be published together with the summary of the debates and a think-piece. International advocacy will be undertaken through the several participants registered for attending this panel debate and through distribution of the final publication, including in social media.*

*I invite you to visit our website which gives a lot of information on what we do, and allow me to welcome you on behalf of the Geneva Centre's staff and its Board of Management, which consists of five internationally recruited personalities.*

*Today's event is in honour of women's remarkable contributions to our societies, the inspiring role they play in the field of human rights in particular and in building resilient and equitable societies in general. Allow me now to open the panel by calling upon the first distinguished panelist.*

## PANELLISTS' PRESENTATIONS

### **Ms Sarah Morse (Australia), *Director of Unchained Business Services***

Ms. Sarah Morse, founder of the corporate consultancy Unchained Solutions, focused her speech on modern slavery, which remains one of the largest-scale human rights violations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to the International Labour Organisation, today over 46 million people are currently living in slavery, with 70 percent of those being women and children.



Ms. Morse denounced that consumers and companies have widely benefited from the exploitation of modern slaves, whose working conditions are inhumane. They are coerced to work long hours, under threat, and with little or no pay.

To combat modern slavery, in Australia, authorities introduced the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act 2018, which is a framework intended for companies and organizations that holds them accountable for their supply chains and operations, and requests them to prove their efforts to end modern slavery.

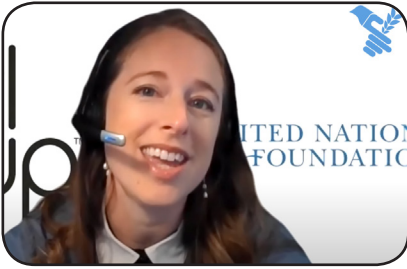
In her statement, Ms. Morse recalled having worked in humanitarian projects and being inspired by the courageous, strong and resilient women in Indonesia, Romania and Spain. This experience led her and her husband to found Unchained Solutions, whose aim is to help Australian businesses comply with the Modern Slavery Act. Unchained Solutions also encourages companies to detect where, other than on their supply chains, they could have a bigger impact in the fight against slavery, at local and global levels.

Ms. Morse then introduced the STOP Slavery Model, which companies can refer to in case they wish to issue a Modern Slavery Position Statement. The STOP Slavery Model, which was developed to help Australian and international organizations understand local modern slavery policies, consists of four core sections

- State the risks of modern slavery practices to people in supply chains and operations.
- Take Action to address risks and prove the efficacy of such actions.
- Outline the consultation process with key stakeholders.
- Propose an improvement plan that outlines year on year effective improvements.

Before concluding her intervention, Ms. Morse also underscored the positive impact that education can have on culture change and reiterated that consumers can also contribute to the fight against modern slavery by purchasing goods from more ethical companies.

**Ms Bailey Leuschen** (United States of America), *Director for Program & Impact at Girl Up*



Ms. Bailey Leuschen is Director for Program & Impact at Girl Up, a girls' leadership organization within the United Nations Foundation, advocating for UN SDG 5. Over the past 10 years, more than 75,000 teenage girls in 120 countries across the world have benefited from Girl Up's programs and trainings.

In her statement, Ms. Leuschen introduced some of Girl Up's initiatives aimed at empowering girls that, across the world, are willing to challenge the status quo. Girl Up indeed believes in the power of youth to make the world a more just place.

Ms. Leuschen stated that, to date, over 4,000 Girl Up Clubs in 120 countries have been established, and then explained how the signature Girl Up's program, which is free and accessible to any girl, functions. Once signed up for the program, girls have access to a range of resources, tools and opportunities to work on gender equality issues, while being part of an international online community.

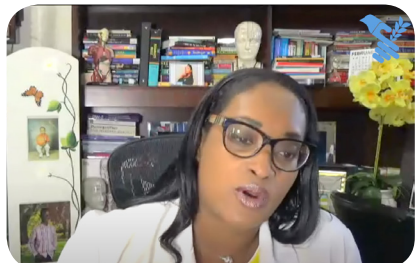
One other Girl Up's initiative is the Girl Up's Teen Advisor leadership program, which is intended for teen girls that for one year serve as Girl Up's advisors.

Ms. Leuschen then presented Girl Up's yearly Leadership Summit, in which prominent speakers such as former First Lady Michelle Obama and 2018 Nobel Peace Laureate Nadia Murad have previously intervened. Usually hosted in Washington DC, last year's Summit was held in virtual mode due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Notwithstanding, over 30,000 changemakers from 130 different countries joined it.

Ms. Leuschen concluded her speech inviting the audience to participate in this year's Summit, to be held online on 13-14 July 2021.

**Dr. Coralanne Griffith-Hunte** (United States of America), *Human, Industrial and Trauma Psychologist, Founder of Created for Greatness Leadership Group, Inc.*

Dr. Coralanne Griffith-Hunte is a Human, Industrial and Trauma Psychologist, founder of Created for Greatness Leadership Group, Inc., which is a humanitarian organization focused on protecting women and children from human trafficking, domestic violence, and all forms of abuse. Over the past 25 years, Dr. Griffith has interacted with local authorities and government





officials, to draft and implement laws that would ensure women and children's rights. In 2018, she also played a vital role in advocating for the End Child Sex Trafficking Bill, which then became law.

In her speech, Dr. Griffith-Hunte reported that, according to the International Labor Organization, to date, around 29 million women and girls are victims of human trafficking, and stressed that there is a need to properly address the physical and psychological trauma that human trafficking victims experience. These victims are indeed more likely to have health problems such as cancer disease and diabetes, later in their life.

For Dr. Griffith-Hunte, when it comes to human trafficking's traumatic experience, there is no-one-size fits-all model to explain it. To help women victims of human trafficking to recover from trauma, they should be empowered and reminded that they should not feel ashamed of what they had to endure in the past.

Dr. Griffith-Hunte concluded her statement by quoting Desmond Tutu, who said "My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together", hence urging the global community to acknowledge women's contributions in human development and to combat women and girls' continuing exploitation.

**Diana Madibekova** (United Kingdom), *PhD Researcher and Teaching Fellow*

In her statement, Ms. Diana Madibekova focused on three main points, which could make the world more equal. First, it should be acknowledged that childhood plays a crucial role in children's physical and psychological development, hence affecting how children will later behave when adults. Second, the impact that education has on young boys' and girls' personal and professional growth should be underlined. Third, in order to make their voices heard and have a successful career, women should support each other and believe in themselves.



On women's rights, Ms. Madibekova quoted the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law report, according to which, notwithstanding some recent improvements, women still do not benefit from the same legal rights as men. This finding shows that gender disparities continue to be entrenched in society, worldwide.

In conclusion, Ms. Madibekova reiterated that "the personality and power of a character [should be untied] from one's gender" and clarified that "gender equality is not about prioritizing and empowering women only". On the contrary, to achieve gender equality, cooperation and communication between all groups of society need to be enhanced.

**Sayed Ahmad Fahim Masoumi** (Afghanistan), *founder of Voice National Development Organization*



Mr. Sayed Ahmad Fahim Masoumi, founder of Voice National Development Organization, denounced that, in Afghanistan, women still do not enjoy the same economic and social rights as men, due to cultural barriers. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated women's participation in the economy, since several women led businesses had to close.

Even in politics, women suffer discrimination considered that, in Afghanistan, just three out of 26 ministers are women.

In 2020, to empower women, Mr. Masoumi and his colleagues ran the Rural Women's Entrepreneurship program, in which 25 women led businesses participated. Women that joined the program benefited from theory and practical lectures, which helped them develop and expand their activities.

Mr. Masoumi also announced that, in summer 2021, his organization plans to launch a new program intended for high school girls to enhance their leadership skills and reiterated that "one of the factors in gender equality is to keep the balance of gender diversity in our workforce". Indeed, as proven by a survey conducted in Poland, while men are usually more prone to risk, women are more cooperative and careful. To promote domestic and global economic development, both women and men's work skills are hence needed.

Mr. Masoumi concluded by urging men to support women's rights and reiterating the crucial role of education towards women's empowerment.

**Tan Ejin** (Malaysia), *Advocacy Champion at WAGGGS*

Ms. Tan Ejin is Advocacy Champion at the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), where she advocates against gender-based violence and promotes women and children's human rights.

In her speech, Ms. Tan addressed the issue of child marriage, which even today affects Malaysian society.



To end child marriage, the Girl Guides Association of Malaysia (GGAM) organized an advocacy workshop in 2018, in which Ms. Tan participated, and where she could learn about the impact of child marriage on individual and social development.

Ms. Tan also briefly presented the different activities that GGAM held to raise public awareness on child marriage and challenge social beliefs about it, such as the “Stop the Violence” workshop, art exhibitions, and a demonstration in front of the Malaysian Parliament, when GGAM requested the government to increase the minimum age of marriage to 18 years, nationwide.

In her final remarks, Ms. Tan recalled her meeting with Malaysia’s Permanent Mission to the UN Representatives, where, as a delegate to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), she advocated for the end of gender-based violence. In Ms. Tan’s words, while not explicitly stated, to end gender-based violence is to end child marriage. To achieve this goal, each of us should contribute to raise awareness about it and take effective action.

**Mohamed Azhar Fathima Ajra** (Sri Lanka), *pro-bono lawyer and Legal Associate at Ameen Law Chamber, Puttalam, Sri Lanka*

Ms. Mohamed Azhar Fathima Ajra is Legal Associate at Ameen Law Chamber, Puttalam, in Sri Lanka, and works as pro-bono lawyer for women and children victims of domestic violence and other forms of abuse.



In her statement, Ms. Azhar addressed issues such as women’s leadership, gender equality in Sri Lanka, and potential measures to accelerate UN SDG 5’s achievement.

In the first place, Ms. Azhar reiterated that women deserve to live in a world free from stereotypes and violence, where they could enjoy equal participation in all sectors of life. Women’s effective involvement in decision-making processes indeed benefits the whole society.

Secondly, Ms. Azhar recalled that Sri Lanka was the first country in the world where a woman was elected Prime Minister, in 1960, and among the first countries in Asia where women won the right to vote, in 1931. However, despite such achievements, in Sri Lanka, women continue to suffer from cultural and structural inequalities, which impede them to develop their inner potential.

Finally, Ms. Azhar indeed reported that, due to socio-cultural factors, in Sri Lanka, only 32.5% of women participate in the labor market, and that the percentage of women parliamentarians amounts to just 5.3%.

In light of the above Ms. Azhar urged governments, private companies, and the whole society to cooperate, and enhance women’s entrepreneurship, while raising awareness on women’s issues to counter deeply rooted gender bias and accelerate the path towards gender equality.

**Ms. Hira Amjad (Pakistan), *Founder and Campaign Director of 'DASTAK – Knock-down Gender-based Violence'***



In her statement, Ms. Hira Amjad shared the vision of DASTAK Foundation for bridging the disconnect between the survivors of violence and the essential services available in Pakistan. Sadly, said Ms. Amjad, Pakistan is considered as the third most dangerous country for women in the world. Women are often not aware of their rights, the resources and opportunities they have,

as well as legal aid, health lines and vital social and psychological support available to them.

As the world was struck by the pandemic, there was a spike in domestic violence in Pakistan, too. In collaboration with the government, DASTAK helped to set up essential emergency helplines, reaching out to women who suffered intimate partner violence, through community engagement activities, and organizing awareness raising activities for men.

Ms Amjad further underlined that the use of digital media tools, short films, animations, documentaries is essential for awareness raising, when the technology needs to be used effectively, inducing behavior change in the community level. Ms. Amjad shared a new initiative, recently launched by DASTAK Foundation TABEER Network, which is a network of South Asia based women rights organizations, which will work collectively to come up with solutions and interventions that can be instrumental in eradication of gender-based violence.

Finally, she spoke against sex-selective abortions and stressed that the survivors of violence should be in the center of all interventions, with special attention given to their rehabilitation, reintegration and empowerment as change-makers.

Apart from the panellists and the Geneva Centre team, more than seventy women and men from at least fifteen countries across the globe joined this virtual event. The attendees actively participated in the discussion by responding to three polls and sending questions to the participants via chat box. Three interactive polls were suggested to share inputs:

- *“Children’s education on gender equality has been set out as a priority in my country and its policies and programs”*: most of the participants agreed with the statement, yet 39% said they “somewhat disagreed with it”.
- *“Women are active participants and have effective access to decision making processes in my country”*: 67% of respondents agreed with the statement, while 25% strongly disagreed.

- *“Efficient national mechanisms exist in my country to prevent and respond to gender-based violence”*: half of the respondents said they either “somewhat” or “strongly disagreed” with the statement. Only 3% of respondents said they “strongly agreed” with it.

*The Geneva Centre fully supports equal rights for women and strives to create synergies with other organizations to promote the realization of rights that are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR 1948).*

*We urge us all to make the commitments of International Women’s Day matter every day to improve the lives of women and men alike. Let us stay in solidarity with women in every corner of the world for working towards positive change in their families, in their communities, and in their countries.*



# **COVID-19: A FALLOUT ERA FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS OR A ROADMAP OF OPPORTUNITIES TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY?<sup>2</sup>**

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2. Researched and written in collaboration with Laura Gutierrez Cadena, Master's Candidate in International Public Management at the School of International Affairs – Sciences Po-Paris.





## **1. Introduction**

For decades women's rights have been progressively enhanced by international human rights organizations and mechanisms. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented major setbacks for their effective protection and implementation within the framework of global recovery plans. In order to understand the major challenges undermining women's rights, this article will first refer to the legal and institutional frameworks they are embedded in. The latter has gradually evolved into placing gender equality at the center of international policy agendas but have failed to coordinate effective implementation of major recommendations and strategies in practice. It can therefore be timely to review the different dimensions of women's rights that have been adversely affected by the pandemic and to examine how this has had a direct negative effect on women's well-being and livelihoods worldwide.

Furthermore, an effective roadmap of opportunities for the promotion of gender equality amidst the COVID-19 pandemic will be suggested. Since the current challenges also offer timely and quality opportunities for policy change, States have now, more than ever, the chance to do better in their promotion of gender equality. Through a comprehensive approach of linking opportunities with gender-related challenges, this article seeks to offer specific recommendations on how to build upon the redefinition of gender-biased institutional and policy frameworks amidst the crisis, and advance policies that uphold women's leadership and empowerment while contributing through these to furthering socio-economic development.

## **2. Legal and Institutional Framework of Women's Rights in the International System**

Gender equality has been promoted within the human rights system and the United Nations' framework ever since the adoption of the UN Charter in 1945, when world leaders agreed to respect and adopt a fundamental principle of "equal rights of men and women". In this sense, protecting and promoting women's human rights became the responsibility of all States, which was further underscored by the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Since then, discrimination based on sex has been prohibited under almost every human rights treaty, including the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In addition, the UN has held four World Conferences to review and appraise the achievements and challenges regarding women's human rights in regard to equality, development and peace. These took place in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995. As a result, a series of five-year reviews, adopted unanimously by 189 countries, have been developed in order to advance in

this domain, marking a significant turning point for the global agenda in promoting gender equality. These also led to the creation of the Beijing Platform for Action: a key global policy document on gender equality that set strategic objectives and actions for the advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality in twelve critical areas of concern<sup>3</sup>.

Furthermore, the most recent efforts by the UN General Assembly in the championing of gender equality was the creation in 2010 of a new international organization dedicated to women's empowerment: UN Women. Its purpose is to promote women's rights globally, increase funding as well as institutionalize into one single body gender equality mandates. For the first time, the UN accelerated the Organization's objective towards the empowerment of women through the increase of resources and widening of mandates, merging and building over the important work of four different institutions:

- The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
- The International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
- Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the efforts of the international human rights system in the promotion of gender equality, important steps towards the consolidation of an institutional and legal framework have been taken through adoption of the treaties by States and the creation of expert bodies. The following were created for the specific purpose of the promotion and implementation of women's human rights and have contributed to its enhancement:

### The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979

The Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and to date, 189 nations have ratified it. This was the result of more than thirty years of work by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), a subsidiary body of ECOSOC established in 1946 to monitor the situation of women and to promote women's rights<sup>5</sup>. The Commission's work has been essential in targeting all areas in which women are discriminated against with respect to men. In this sense, gender equality has been at the centre of the agenda as it is referred to in fourteen articles of

3. The Beijing Platform for Action. UN Women (2021). <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about>

4. About UN Women. UN Women (2021). <https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women>.

5. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. OHCHR.org (2021). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>.

the Convention<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, the most recent work of the 65<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission, has been instrumental in understanding COVID-19's most adverse effects on women's participation in public life. Among the Session's main objectives is achieving women's full equality at decision-making tables, which has been certainly undermined by States during the pandemic<sup>7</sup>.

### The CEDAW Committee (treaty body), established in 1979

The Committee is composed of twenty-three independent experts who are in charge of monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women through the review of the reports which are submitted by State parties every four years. In 2000, an Optional Protocol to the Convention entered into force empowering the Committee to consider communications submitted by individuals or groups of individuals on alleged violations to the Convention<sup>8</sup>.

### The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted in 1993

This Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly resolution 48/104 and aims to strengthen States' commitments to globally participate in policy formation efforts regarding violence against women. The resolution is the first international tool explicitly dealing with violence against women, which it defines as any physical, sexual, or psychological violence or the threat of it, toward women and girls occurring in the home, the community, and/or condoned by the State. The Declaration became highly relevant as it contributed to acknowledging gender violence as a threat to the peace and development of nations, making it an even more urgent issue for States to effectively address through their cross-sectoral policies<sup>9</sup>.

### The Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, established in 1994

The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women was created in 1994 by the former UN Commission on Human Rights, with the purpose of ensuring

6. Beijing +5 - Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, 5-9 June 2000. UN.org (2021). <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/fs9.htm>.

7. COVID-19 has exposed endemic gender inequality, Guterres tells UN Women's commission. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087392>.

8. OHCHR | Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. OHCHR.org (2021). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/cedawindex.aspx>.

9. OHCHR | Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. OHCHR.org (2021). <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ViolenceAgainstWomen.aspx>.

that the vital issue of violence against women was effectively integrated into the UN human rights framework and mechanisms. As part of her mandate, the Special Rapporteur transmits urgent appeals and communications to States regarding alleged cases of violence against women, undertakes country visits, and submits annual thematic reports. She also makes recommendations at the local, national, regional and international levels aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against women and remedying its consequences. The work of the successive Special Rapporteurs has been valuable and significantly contributed to the adoption of a comprehensive and universal approach to the elimination of violence against women and also to a more accountable system<sup>10</sup>.

### The Working Group on the Issue of Discrimination Against Women in Law and Practice, established in 2010

The establishment of the Working Group by the Human Rights Council (HRC) at its 15<sup>th</sup> Session in September 2010 was a milestone in the long road towards women's equality. Its main tasks involve developing a dialogue with States and other actors on laws that have a discriminatory impact on women, on best practices related to the elimination of laws that discriminate against women or are discriminatory to women in terms of implementation and, on this basis prepare a compendium of best practices. Additionally, it also submits an annual report to the HRC which draws important conclusions and formulates recommendations from the aforementioned activities<sup>11</sup>.

Other important human rights mechanisms and instruments that refer to women's rights, which have contributed to the enhancement of their legal and institutional framework include the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual violence in Armed Conflict, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Declaration on the Right to Development. Additionally, in 2015 Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Agenda ("Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls") marked a significant policy framework milestone as it recalled the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women's important link between gender equality and development. This meant that in order for States to achieve their desired development, they would have to ensure the implementation of effective gender equality policies.

Even though much progress has been made in the institutionalization and standardizing of important mechanisms, treaties and instruments, there is still a long way to go in the implementation of gender equality policies on the ground. This has been a direct result of the insufficient interaction and coordination between the different

10. OHCHR | Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. OHCHR.org (2021). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/srwomen/pages/srwomenindex.aspx>

11. OHCHR | WG on discrimination against women. OHCHR.org (2021) <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/WGWomenIndex.aspx>

mechanisms and, very often, the duplication of their mandates. For example, there is a disconnect between the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and SDG 5 with regard to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and other regional instruments. In a general manner, there is a need for strengthening coordination between the different human rights instruments and therefore, for the development of comprehensive action plans that involve all the mechanisms' capacities and financial resources and direct them towards the achievement of common goals and objectives.

Given the numerous challenges that the women's rights legal and institutional framework already faces with regard to its weak coordination, implementation strategies and accountability, it makes it even more complicated to effectively respond to COVID-19 women-related needs. It has become more urgent than ever for States and international organizations to build a more solid and coherent legal and institutional framework that responds in a timely and quality manner to the call of millions of women that are facing the most adverse effects of the crisis.

### **3. The Adverse Effects of COVID-19 on Women's Rights**

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become evident that recovery plans by States have still considerable scope for improvement in terms of adopting a rights-based approach that effectively contributes to the protection of women and promotes gender equality. As the UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated, "regressive laws have resurfaced, violence targeting women and girls have increased, and the "seismic shocks" of the COVID-19 pandemic have decimated many gains"<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the effect this has had on women that were already under institutionalized poverty, racism and all kinds of discrimination has been devastating, as they have had to face higher rates of COVID-19 transmission and deaths, including being more exposed to loss of earnings and livelihood.

Apart from the near total absence of a gender perspective in recovery plans, it is also worrisome that most governments continue to shift their budget priorities across the public and private sectors without adequately taking into consideration the effects this will have on the protection of women and girl's rights, as this will consequently result in major obstacle to implementation on the ground of gender-related policies<sup>13</sup>.

In order to develop a comprehensive analysis of the most pressing issues regarding COVID-19's adverse effects on women's rights, it is important to cover five essential dimensions – economic, political, health, gender-based violence, and conflict – which

12. Gender equality, the 'unfinished human rights struggle of this century': UN chief. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1088512>.

13. UNWomen.org (2021). <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>

will allow to shed light on how the crisis has exacerbated many long-standing gender-related issues and how governments could effectively respond to these through their recovery action plans and policies.

## Economic Dimension

Under this dimension, it is fundamental to refer to the pandemic's negative effects regarding the gender pay gap, the growing poverty among women and the lack of effective job and social protection schemes. First, regarding the gender pay gap, it is evident that with the COVID-19 crisis this has widened as around 435 million women and girls are living on less than \$1.90 a day, including 47 million more women that are being pushed towards poverty<sup>14</sup>. Sayed Ahmad Fahim Masoumi<sup>15</sup>, a speaker at the Geneva Centre Panel<sup>16</sup>, highlighted how the crisis has affected women-led small and medium firms and how this has decreased their income as well as generated a loss of access to loans, subsidies and financial supports to build startups or invest in the sectors of their interest<sup>17</sup>.

In regard to the increase in jobs losses for women, this also means their rights to lead economically independent and dignified lives are being heavily affected as the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, resulting from the closure of schools, childcare facilities and increase in elder care duties, is driving many to trauma and mental breakdowns. Large numbers of women are being forced to abandon the job market to take care of their children and do home care work which means less or no earnings at all, which thereby prevents them securing their livelihoods and hence also affects their well-being.

Furthermore, it is important to refer to COVID-19 adverse effects on the productivity of sectors in which most women are employed, these being hostels/hotels, tourism, catering, and the service industry. Many women within these sectors have lost their jobs or have seen a considerable decrease of their earnings as a result, while dealing with the added repercussions of not benefitting from social protection and safety nets (normally, associated with these types of jobs)<sup>18</sup>. In this context, recovery plans continue failing to adequately address the fact that women are currently more likely to lose their jobs than men, and that the crisis has, indeed, a greater adverse effect on

14. UNDP, UN Women, Gender Inequality Research Lab (Pittsburgh University) <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>

15. See the full statement by Mr. Sayed Ahmad Fahim Masoumi in the Summary Records section of this book.

16. The Geneva Centre Panel, "Pathways to an Equal Future: Women Inspiring Change", took place on 8 March 2021.

17. First Person: Fighting for women's financial freedom. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086162>.

18. UN Development Programme urges temporary basic income for women hit hard by COVID-19 fallout. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086362>.

women's careers compared to that of men's.

Tan Ejn<sup>19</sup>, another speaker at the Geneva Centre's Panel, addressed the direct threats associated with women's job losses and upsurge of unpaid care work by referring to the fact that more than ten million girls will be at risk of child marriage over the next decade. In this regard, she observed that child marriage can curtail women's rights in relation to their professional and socio-economic future. More specifically, she underscored the effect of this on women in Malaysia, who have had to suffer an increase in child marriages amidst the pandemic, and the deep-rooted and complex causes of this practice, which are linked "to so many underlying issues in society, such as poverty, sexual education, legal enforcements, social norms and gender-based violence".

Lastly, the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker tool has elucidated how current economic recovery processes, in view of their shortcomings in this domain, are contributing to undermining women-specific needs to the point that as of March 2021, only "13 percent of 2,280 COVID-19 fiscal, social protection, and labour market measures have targeted women's economic security"<sup>20</sup>. This is deeply troubling as it amounts to the fact that many of these countries' measures have also been implemented in a temporary and restrictive manner, likewise undermining women's needs for long-term recovery schemes.

### Political Dimension

The 2021 "Women in Politics" Map<sup>21</sup>, which was recently released by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women, has evidenced the long road that is still ahead to achieving women's equal political representation in parliamentary positions worldwide. Although for the first time in history, 25 percent of women currently occupy parliamentary positions across the globe, for many countries there has been very little or no progress in the matter, and this has only gotten worse with the pandemic<sup>22</sup>. The study illustrates how women's leadership and decision-making skills have been systematically excluded from public space and from recovery task forces in charge of making vital policy decisions on dealing with the crisis. Additionally, the IPU Secretary-General stated that the increase of women in political decision-making processes is not sufficient given that 70 percent of the sectors where women work, these being health/care and service work, have been the most affected by the

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19. See the full statement by Ms. Tan Ejn in the Summary Records section.

20. Women 'systematically excluded' from COVID response, despite being worst affected. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087982>.

21. Women in politics: 2021 | Digital library: Publications. UN Women. (2021) <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/03/women-in-politics-map-2021>.

22. Proportion of women parliamentarians worldwide reaches 'all-time high'. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086582>.



pandemic<sup>23</sup>.

Even though women have started to fill crucial gaps in providing key services and information in post-COVID efforts, often, the decisions regarding their future well-being and livelihoods are being left to men. In this regard, measures within the private and public sectors continue to be scarce as companies and institutions remain reticent to install effective quotas that would guarantee women's equal participation, especially in top-management positions<sup>24</sup>. Consequently, this under-representation in decision-making roles as well as a lack of leadership opportunities has led to gender-biased policies, further exacerbating an unequal recovery from the crisis. More specifically, COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on women's rights for an inclusive and participative public life<sup>25</sup>. Other adverse effects include the resulting biased economic models within countries that fail to accurately value and measure women's productive and valuable work at home<sup>26</sup>.

With regard to women's equal representation in vaccination task forces, the progress is equally tame. Professor Sarah Gilbert of Oxford University commended women's enormous contribution to the timely and quality development of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, as two-thirds of the task force that developed it was composed of women. This is also the case of the BioNTech company in which women make up 54 per cent of the employees and almost half of the top management. In this regard, vaccine pioneer Dr. Özlem Türeci indicated that a gender balanced team was the key success factor in guiding BioNTech into developing the COVID-19 vaccine within 11 months. However, it is still worrisome that these cases are not the rule but rather the exception, as in the majority of vaccination teams across countries only one-third of the leading positions are occupied by women<sup>27</sup>.

In 2020, UN Women announced its theme for International Women's Day as "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world", while the 65<sup>th</sup> Session of the CSW<sup>28</sup> chose to discuss women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life. Despite these efforts, the implementation of the resulting guidelines by States continue to be weak as domestic policies fail to translate them into concrete steps on the ground that would effectively address women's both long-standing and COVID-related equal representation needs.

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23. Proportion of women parliamentarians worldwide reaches 'all-time high'. UN News (2021). Supra note 17.

24. UN highlights transformative power of equal participation, marking International Women's Day. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086662>.

25. Women must be 'front and centre' of pandemic recovery, UN chief says. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087502>.

26. COVID-19 doesn't discriminate, but societies do', say women frontliners UN News. (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086692>.

27. Ibid.

28. United Nations Commission on the Status of Women



## Health Dimension

Women make up 70 percent of the healthcare workers most affected by the pandemic. However, the needs and interests of the general health workforce and front-line health workers, especially nurses, midwives and community health workers, continue to be undermined under vital health recovery plans<sup>29</sup>. Recent data from Germany, Italy, Spain and the United States confirmed COVID-19 cases among female health workers are two to three times higher than those observed among their male counterparts<sup>30</sup>. Additionally, evidence suggests that women care workers are at high risks due to their close contact with others. In addition, the effect is even worse for migrant women and women from marginalized ethnic groups which are overrepresented in this field, and who fall victims to additional health burdens such as higher mortality rates, higher infection rates and less accessibility to sexual and reproductive health services<sup>31</sup>.

Furthermore, among the most adverse effects of the crisis on women's health rights is the inability of 12 million women to access sexual and reproductive health benefits as in most countries these funds have been shifted to other sectors<sup>32</sup>. This has resulted in the increase in maternal mortality, morbidity, adolescent pregnancies, HIV cases and sexually transmitted diseases. In this regard, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) predicted that 47 million women will be unable to use contraceptives due to the crisis, inevitably increasing the chances of unintended pregnancies and with this, exacerbating existing inequalities<sup>33</sup>.

Within the UN's most recent and prominent efforts regarding the promotion of women health workers' rights, is the Gender Equal Health Initiative which was launched with the purpose of increasing the amount of women health leaders<sup>34</sup>, promoting equal pay, and more importantly, ensuring safe and decent working conditions for health workers, which include access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and vaccines<sup>35</sup>.

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29. UN (2020). Policy Brief: The impact of Covid-19 on Women. New York, United States of America. [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy\\_brief\\_on\\_covid\\_impact\\_on\\_women\\_9\\_april\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_april_2020.pdf)

30. Ibid

31. OECD (2021) What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on immigrants and their children? <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/what-is-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-immigrants-and-their-children-e7cbb7de/>.

32. UN (2020). *supra* note 23.

33. United Nations Population Fund (2020). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family planning and ending gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and child marriage. <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/impact-covid-19-pandemic-family-planning-and-ending-gender-based-violence-female-genital>

34. Women health leaders refers to women at the forefront of decisions that shape caregiving policies, including overseeing business units such as operations, human resources, accounting or overseeing specific disciplines or regions.

35. COVID-19 doesn't discriminate, but societies do', say women frontliners. UN News (2021). *Supra* note 21.

## Gender-Based Violence Dimension

This dimension is of paramount importance as the number of reports regarding violence against women during the pandemic reached a critical new high, with intimate partner violence being the most prevalent. This has been the result of widespread stay-at-home orders that have forced women to live with their abusers, which often led to tragic consequences such as physical and mental trauma. Evidence shows that only a third of the countries have treated violence against women and girls as a central part of their national and local recovery plans<sup>36</sup>. In this regard, COVID-19 response emergency plans have largely failed to address this pressing issue and even when they have tried, implementation on the ground has fallen short. Even in developed countries in which important legislation has been passed, implementation remains a challenge as poor resource allocation has resulted in ineffective response policies and actions.

Overall, 736 million women have suffered from physical or sexual violence during their lifetimes and most have experienced this before their mid-twenties<sup>37</sup>. The stigma and under-reporting of sexual abuse has also become an even greater issue with women having to stay all hours of the day with their aggressors. More troubling indeed is that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these long-standing issues which were already on the rise even before the pandemic<sup>38</sup>.

Additionally, States' lack of segregated data collection has also led to ineffective policies that fail to address the specificities of these cases, taking into account that the pandemic has had a differential impact on particular vulnerable groups of women and girls. As the UNHCR has highlighted, refugee, displaced and stateless women and girls facing poverty have had to endure gender-based violence in much worse ways than others since the advent of COVID-19.

## Conflict Areas Dimension

In 2020 the UN Secretary-General called for a global ceasefire to focus efforts on fighting the pandemic. Nevertheless, the struggle did not stop for women in conflict-affected areas that, on top of having to face the effects of disastrous wars, were also left to compete under these unfavourable conditions for accessing medical supplies, services and food. Women's rights in conflict have been largely undermined and unaddressed within international and national recovery plans that are failing to effectively target the widening of existing gender inequalities as a result of two

36. Women 'systematically excluded' from COVID response, despite being worst affected. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087982>.

37. Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence. WHO.int (2021). <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>.

38. Ibid.

coexisting life-threatening crises: COVID-19 and armed conflict. The International Rescue Committee highlighted that women in conflict have been left out of testing and their health has not been considered a priority by many countries, resulting in grave repercussions on the protection of their rights<sup>39</sup>.

Similarly, as testing is extremely limited across conflict-affected countries, there has been an even more restricted access to it and healthcare services for women, despite their increased exposure to the disease as primary caregivers and healthcare workers. Additionally, the COVID-19 restrictions have also gravely affected and compromised the work of female human rights defenders, given that a majority of them are key actors in conflict zones for peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts (often being referred to as first respondents). This means the crisis has not only compromised and limited their peace-promotion work but has also left them unprotected from threats and violence<sup>40</sup>.

#### **4. Beyond the Challenges: A Roadmap for the Effective Promotion of Gender Equality during and after the COVID-19 pandemic**

While the dimensions mentioned above present some serious and complex challenges to the effective implementation of women's rights, the COVID-19 crisis can and, indeed, should be viewed as a window of numerous opportunities for countries to do better. Taking into account the current pressure that the crisis is exerting on the redefinition of national traditional institutional frameworks, now is definitely the moment to seek change and improvements. In addition, this pressure is pushing States to better address the needs of the most affected populations, including women, within their territories. In this perspective, countries find themselves offered a new opportunity to tackle the crisis through sustainable and gender-equal recovery models that are capable of fostering economic growth through the effective promotion and respect of women's rights in all of their dimensions.

In recognizing that women's rights are an integral part of human rights, it is important to look beyond the current challenges by adopting comprehensive strategies that link opportunities with each of the gender-related dimensions and its specific issues. Thus, the following series of recommendations could provide ways of how these linkages could effectively respond to and address women's rights amidst the COVID-19 crisis and beyond:

*First, States must see that in building gender-balanced recovery policies they are also inherently improving their socio-economic growth which is a most desirable outcome amidst a clearly disastrous economic crisis:*

39. Al Jazeera. (2020). Coronavirus testing may not reach women in conflict zones: IRC. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/24/coronavirus-testing-may-not-reach-women-in-conflict-zones-irc>

40. Women's Rights are Human Rights. OHCHR.org (2021). <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/events/whrd/womenrightsarehr.pdf>.

Empirical evidence regarding female leaders' positive management of the crisis suggests that States greatly benefit economically when advancing women's leadership in all sectors. This means women's active participation in important management positions has proven to enhance economic results by increasing investment in social protection, advances in sustainable peace processes and improvements in effective climate action. In this perspective, the development of feminist economic models that are able to prioritize gender equality and repeal discriminatory laws, would certainly contribute to an increase in socio-economic growth globally<sup>41</sup>.

With this model in mind, digital finance should be used as an effective tool by all governments to lift women out of poverty. More so, in developing countries where women often do not have access to the networks and resources, they need to obtain their own capital to start their businesses. Hence, extending digital financial services to women becomes extremely important in allowing them to manage their own money and be agents of change of their own financial resources, and can likewise contribute to the growth of the countries' financial system overall<sup>42</sup>. As Diana Madibekova<sup>43</sup> accurately stated at the Geneva Centre's Panel, when "one of us is left behind, everyone loses".

Furthermore, it is not just an opportunity for States to do better from a purely economic standpoint but, from a rights-based approach, also a chance for women to become architects of their own socio-economic and cultural development. As decision-makers within the new recovery plans and policies, they will most likely be able to independently shape their future as well as that of gender equality as a whole. If this is the case, then young women will also feel empowered to become role models for the next generations as well as contribute to choosing good business and political leaders within countries<sup>44</sup>. As Bailey Leuschen<sup>45</sup> also appropriately described at the Geneva Centre Panel, youth has the power to change the world as it continually strives to share helpful tools, and at the same time, it needs "encouragement and a global community to help [it] in [its] efforts".

*Second, in taking good advantage of the opportunity to redefine their institutions and established governmental policies, States must go beyond temporal palliative measures to address women's rights violations on the ground, and develop long-term comprehensive policy solutions:*

Long-term policy solutions involve repealing of discriminatory laws, the development of economic inclusion strategies with equal pay, promoting effective implementation

41. UNWomen.org (2021). <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>.

42. First Person: Fighting for women's financial freedom. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086162>.

43. See the full statement by Ms. Diana Madibekova in the Summary Records section.

44. Chamorro-Premuzic, Tomas and Avivah Wittenberg-Cox. 2020. "Will the Pandemic Reshape Notions of Female Leadership?". Harvard Business Review. 26 June. <https://hbr.org/2020/06/will-the-pandemic-reshape-notions-of-female-leadership>

45. See the full statement by Ms. Bailey Leuschen in the Summary Records section.

of policies addressing violence against women and consolidating their reporting and accountability mechanisms. Women's full inclusion and participation in all these policy processes becomes essential in establishing long-term strategies that address and promote their specific needs.

Moreover, long term policy solutions should also factor the gender equality question into all sectors and levels of governance. Looking at good practices as is the case of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, it is evident that there the gender equality principle has been integrated into all sectors and levels, thereby allowing for timely gender-balance responses to the crisis. Thus, the long-term effectiveness of these policies has resulted from a cross-sectoral and inter-departmental approach that permeates all institutions' policies and frameworks of action. As Sarah Morse<sup>46</sup> also suggested, solutions must be made on a global systemic level, bringing all issues from the margins to the mainstream.

Even in countries reticent to an explicit "feminist foreign policy", evidence suggests that gender-based policies can be effective in the long-term if put into practice through a cross-sectoral approach. While, at times, explicitly calling these "feminist policies" can provide an opportunity for the opposition to refute them, the United States' case has proven that "the perfect should not be the enemy of the good"<sup>47</sup>. This means that, even when gender-based policies are not given the "feminist title", they can reach the same levels of success if implemented at all levels of government.

As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Michelle Bachelet, has previously expressed, there is hope for long-term effective policies as long as they address the core of the gender equality issue: discrimination. Hence, the focus should be shifted towards this factor which permits the development of different laws that prevent women from having control over their own bodies, owning land or accessing credits<sup>48</sup>.

A recently published report by the UNFPA<sup>49</sup> accurately describes how gender discrimination deprives women and girls of bodily autonomy, reinforcing inequalities and violence. Discriminatory norms can be then perpetuated by the communities, reinforced by political, economic, legal and social institutions. In order to combat this, States should develop comprehensive policies that effectively address the three dimensions of autonomy, which are, women's power to make decisions about their health, their sex lives, and their methods of contraception.

46. See the full statement by Ms. Sarah Morse in the Summary Records section.

47. Part of Melanne Vermeer statement made at SciencesPo's Panel on "Feminist Foreign Policy: a comparative perspective from France, Sweden and the United States". She is currently the Executive Director of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security at Georgetown University.

48. OHCHR | Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, commemorating International Women's Day. OHCHR.org (2021). <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26858&LangID=E>.

49. UNFPA (2021) My Body Is My Own: Claiming the Rights to Autonomy and Self-Determination. UNFPA.org (2021). [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SoWP2021\\_Report\\_-\\_EN\\_web.3.21\\_0.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SoWP2021_Report_-_EN_web.3.21_0.pdf).

Furthermore, long-term policy solutions require substantial and sustained investment with particular attention to intersecting inequalities<sup>50</sup>. Very often countries fail to effectively invest in integrated social protection, health and education services that could address the multiple vulnerabilities that women and girls face throughout their lives. This is why national action plans need adequate resources as many continue to be underfunded. These action plans should be able to foster the empowerment and autonomy of women and girls by putting a central emphasis on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Community mobilization programmes and advocacy campaigns that work with the media can complement these efforts by challenging unequal power relations and discriminatory social norms and eliminating gender stereotypes. For this, it is imperative that men and boys be integrated into the gender equality question as well as in the discussions regarding women's bodily autonomy.

*Third, it has become more relevant than ever for States and international actors to take advantage of the newly implemented COVID-19 monitoring systems. This will produce timely and quality disaggregated data that will allow for women's inclusive and context-specific needs to be addressed by gender-balanced policies:*

In this regard, governments and international actors should understand their important role in producing disaggregated data that allows for the development of intersectoral policies. This is extremely vital as COVID-19 challenges have differential impacts on the rights of a diverse number of vulnerable groups of women and girls. Hence, in order to come up with a more robust and evidence-based system that promotes gender equality, it is crucial that governments collect and promote open access to timely and quality disaggregated data. This is not only essential for decision-makers to make informed policy decisions, but it is also very useful for the private and public finance sectors to develop gender needs-based strategies that increase the access and number of women clients that can benefit from their services.

*Fourth, in understanding that women at the helm of the COVID-19 pandemic have had a direct positive effect in the reduction of deaths as well as faster and effective responses, there is an opportunity for communities within countries to culturally redefine their conceptions of what good leadership should be:*

Following the statement that “real leaders are forged in crises” and that most women leaders have been able to effectively respond to them, the COVID-19 pandemic presents a timely opportunity for communities across nations to reform their long-standing perspective of associating men with tough/bold and effective leadership. The reality of this crisis has shown that women's leadership in all sectors (including those most affected by the pandemic) has effectively responded to urgent economic and social needs of the populations. In this light, it can serve societies to culturally adopt a more gender-balanced perception of leadership that increases group welfare and is based on the principle of merit.

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50. Ibid.



*Fifth, in addressing the adverse effects on women's rights of two life-threatening situations, namely pandemic and armed conflict, countries and international actors must seek to guarantee women's leading roles within peacebuilding efforts:*

As the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) highlighted, 2021 marks a historic moment for Afghanistan to obtain lasting peace, and that can only be achieved if women have important roles in decision-making processes at all levels of the peace process. Towards this end, women should have a leading role in the negotiations leading to the resolution of conflicts, and it remains the responsibility of States and international actors to adequately empower them and expand their participation, in order to ensure just and sustainable peace processes that protect the rights of all.

*Sixth, in recognizing developing countries' unequal stance in facing the crisis, developed countries must step up in by helping them provide financial support for women to effectively address upsurges in poverty rates and the widening of gender inequality gaps:*

According to UNDP, women's economic condition in developing countries would greatly improve if they received a temporary basic income to provide financial security for them and their families. This would enable 613 million working-age women to absorb the shock of the pandemic and also be empowered to make independent decisions about money, livelihoods and well-being<sup>51</sup>.

This does not mean that developed countries should not be doing the same within their own territories to contain poverty and gender gaps from widening. For even in the most developed countries, women's systematic job losses is leading them into poverty, and, therefore, these States need also to adopt concrete measures that can counteract the negative repercussions of women's lack of access to regular incomes.

*Seventh, in taking the newly established governmental task forces as an opportunity to address the crisis, male dominated teams should be transformed into inclusive mechanisms that advance equal representation at all decision-making processes:*

Most recovery task forces continue to be male-dominated teams, undermining women's full representation and leadership. Governments should therefore recognize gender equality as a question of power<sup>52</sup>, and in doing so, effectively empower the other half of the world's population to participate through top-level decision-making positions and critical political discussions. A policy tool to achieve this could be development of stimulus packages that target investment in women owned businesses and the care economy<sup>53</sup>, as well as setting parity targets and quotas at all levels of

51. UN Development Programme urges temporary basic income for women hit hard by COVID-19 fallout. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086362>.

52. Here, understood by "gender equality as a question of power" is a notion that power has been "jealously guarded by men for millennia. It is time to stop trying to change women and start changing the systems that prevent them from achieving their potential", as pronounced by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres at The New School in his speech on how achieving gender equality can help transform the world.

53. The care economy is a system that consists of activities and relationships involved in meeting the

government to guarantee women's equal representation and leadership.

As the IPU has shown, based on the numerous country elections that were held in 2020, well-designed quotas enable women's political progress. In addition, systemic changes can be also achieved if more women participate within the institutions that create quotas-related policies. During the Geneva Centre Panel, this was clearly highlighted by Mohamed Azhar Fathima Ajra<sup>54</sup> who underlined the importance of having "women at every table where decisions are being made [as] women's full and effective participation and leadership in all areas of life drives progress for everyone." Nevertheless, as Diana Madibekova also suggested, this does not mean that the purpose of putting more women at the table is excluding men from them, but rather calling to the need of making these tables larger.

*Eighth, if countries wish to effectively address the historical highs of gender-based violence amidst the crisis, gender transformative policies must be put in place:*

These measures include strengthening the survivor-centered health systems; encouraging interventions that address discriminatory beliefs regarding gender; targeted investments in evidence-based prevention strategies as well as in data collection; the improvement of measurements on violence against women; and a well-built accountability system that provides effective legal response to the numerous abuses. Additionally, policies should also be targeting young people in order to foster gender equitable attitudes since early on and keep advancing these through adulthood<sup>55</sup>. As Hira Amjad<sup>56</sup> clearly evidenced in her statement at the Geneva Centre Panel, domestic violence must be addressed through policies that raise women's awareness of the repercussions that enduring physical, psychological and economic violence can bring to their future and their livelihoods. For example, in Pakistan, the problem is "that [women] do not even realize that what happens to them is wrong."

*Ninth, gender-balanced education policies for children must be central to national recovery plans:*

As Diana Madibekova accurately mentioned during the Geneva Centre Panel, the role of education and career support networks is vital in combating the gender inequality gap. In addition, these efforts should be complemented by women's capacities to create allies within the workplace and advance their careers from early

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physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of care. It is referred by the International Labour Organization as the "provision of care for persons with short-term or with chronic sicknesses and/or disabilities. Care for the elderly and the sick often falls on women and girls. The care economy is growing as the demand for childcare and care for the elderly is increasing in all regions. It will thus create a great number of jobs in the coming years. However, care work across the world remains characterised by a void of benefits and protections, low wages or non-compensation, and exposure to physical, mental and, in some cases, sexual harm". Further information can be found at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/care-economy/lang--en>.

54. See the full statement by Ms. Mohamed Azhar Fathima Ajra in the Summary Records section.

55. Endemic violence against women 'cannot be stopped with a vaccine' – WHO chief. UN News (2021). <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086812>.

56. See the full statement by Ms. Hira Amjad in the Summary Records section.



on, always promoting “self-praise even when no one believes in their working skills or leadership capabilities”. Here, there might be hope that this conjunction crisis brings women of the world together into building a new global compact that upholds their empowerment and provides a more solid basis for gender equality and the elimination of all forms of violence against them.

*Finally, while a number of major UN meetings such as, notably, treaty bodies reviews, have been postponed, it is of paramount importance that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and broader civil society step in by promoting multi-stakeholder panels and discussions that allow for the emergence of much needed multidimensional solutions to the effective promotion of women's rights:*

Thus, NGOs and civil society activists would become crucial bridging actors that bring together a diverse set of international and local actors enabling the emergence of much needed multi-stakeholder approaches to the gender equality question as well as the elaboration of multidimensional responses and recommendations. To ascertain pathways to an equal future, decision-makers should work jointly with civil society organizations and women rights' groups, medical and social workers, teachers, psychologists, students and activists in order to better understand the needs of all women and girls, ensure their safety and lend the deserved value to their existence. To quote the eloquent Dr. Coralanne Griffith-Hunte<sup>57</sup>, “every female was created uniquely for a divine purpose. The treasure of their purpose should not be determined according to their labour or gender, but rather highlighting the beauty of their intellect, innovation and uniqueness while creating a world that's safe for their souls to show up. “

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57. See the full statement by Dr. Coralanne Griffith-Hunte in the Summary Records section.



**ANNEX**  
**STATEMENTS BY PANEL MEMBERS**



## Written Contribution

### Ms. Sarah Morse (Australia)

Director of Unchained Business Services



Sarah Morse is former Young Australian of the Year (NSW), and is the Director of Unchained Business Services. Unchained is a for-purpose business which inspires Australian companies to be leaders in addressing modern slavery. 100% of net profits from Unchained will be reinvested back into social enterprises providing meaningful employment to survivors of modern slavery. With twenty-five years of humanitarian work, leadership experience and cancer nursing, Sarah uses the lessons she has learned to inspire people to live with empathy, positivity and purpose. Sarah is passionate about seeing Australian businesses increase trust by demonstrating authentic values, and by making ethical choices.

## Modern Slavery: Making a Global Impact Through Local Legislation

There are more slaves in the world today than in any other time in history. Many people assume that slavery was abolished more than 150 years ago. However, the International Labour Organisation states that there are currently more than 46 million people living in slavery in the world today. That is one in every 185 people on the planet, and almost twice the population of Australia.

Slavery is one of the largest-scale human rights violations of our time.

Unseen UK describes modern slavery as the commodification of people for the purpose of exploitation and financial gain. Put simply, it is someone having control of the human rights of voice, choice and movement of another person.

In my home country of Australia, The Global Slavery Index estimates there are 15,000 people living in slavery. While the department of criminology reports a lower figure of 1 900, we must interpret any statistics with the understanding that slavery is often underreported - only one in five survivors are actually identified. Regardless, even one person experiencing slavery is too many. In Australia, we predominantly find people in slavery in the agriculture, construction, domestic service, hospitality and sex industries.

\$150 billion US dollars are generated by forced labour every year (ILO). This means it is one of the three largest criminal activities in the world, alongside drug trafficking and trade in counterfeit goods.

**While they may not be in physical chains, people in modern slavery are bound by the chains of debt and the shackles of poverty which leads to exploitation.**

The word slavery can conjure up harrowing images of people in shackles and chains.

While slavery may not always appear in such a form today, we must not ignore the significant impact slavery currently has on valuable people within our global community.

Modern slavery encompasses forced servitude and forced or compulsory labour, debt bondage and human trafficking, as well as forced marriage, child labour and child soldiers. People are forced to work through coercion, threats, violence, little or no pay, and fear. They experience long working hours, and sub-standard working conditions. We find these people in the fields where our products are grown, in the factories where our goods are made, on ships where our seafood is caught, in brick kilns, and in the sex industry.

More often than not, they are hidden in plain sight. Of the 46 million people experiencing slavery globally, around 25 million are being exploited for cheap labour.

**Consumers and companies have been benefitting from slavery for many years.**

The clothes we buy, the food we eat, the technology we use, the suppliers we choose and the businesses in which we invest, all have an impact on people experiencing slavery throughout production and supply chains.

In 2015, United Nations Member States agreed to take immediate and effective measures to end modern slavery, forced labour and human trafficking by 2030, in Sustainable Development Goal 8.7. However, gains will not be made by tinkering at the margins. Instead, solutions will require change at the systemic level. We must bring modern slavery risks and human trafficking concerns from the margins into the mainstream.

**It is within our power to end modern slavery within the next decade. To do it, we need conscious collaboration and clear vision.**

In Australia, the introduction of the Commonwealth Modern Slavery Act 2018, is giving a robust framework to underpin action around modern slavery. Companies and organisations are not only being asked to be held to account for their supply chains and operations, but also being asked to show how they are making an impact on modern slavery. Many similar laws exist and are in progress around the world, and in order to continue to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals, as an international community, we need to fight for similar laws in all countries.

For twenty years I have worked in development contexts as a nurse and humanitarian. Poignant life experiences have spurred on my deep conviction for change in the area of modern slavery. I have worked with some of the world's poorest people, and have seen first-hand the vulnerability which poverty and lack of education brings to individuals and communities, and exposes them to modern slavery practices.

In particular, the years spent working with vulnerable people in Romania, I came to a deep understanding of the push and pull factors which lead to modern slavery.

Most recently, my husband and I spent five years in Spain. Spain is one of the major transit and destination countries for human trafficking in Europe. While my husband

was researching his doctorate into human trafficking, I worked in a safe house for survivors of human trafficking in the sex industry.

**If nothing else, my work with these vulnerable people around the world has taught me that each of the 46 million people currently experiencing modern slavery have names, stories, families and dreams.**

I've encountered many people over the years, who inspire me with courage, resilience and hope in the face of extreme poverty. Other stories, have affected me deeply because of the injustice suffered and stir me with anger and a desire to fight for change on their behalf.

After years spent working with the poor survivors of modern slavery, when we returned to Australia, my husband and I decided to fight modern slavery from the top. We wanted to be part of a wider culture change, which ensures that exploiting people in the production of our everyday goods and services is no longer acceptable in Australia.

We founded Unchained Solutions, which is a corporate consultancy aimed at inspiring Australian organisations to be leaders in impacting modern slavery. We help Australian businesses comply with The Modern Slavery Act by looking at their supply chains and procurement practices, and identify where there is risk of slavery. We also inspire them to lead beyond compliance and see where they can make a greater impact within their own circles of influence, both locally and globally.

For example, we are working with educational and health institutions, who each have a reach of 100,000 individuals. These institutions are making modern slavery a primary focus, increasing awareness and consumer pressure around where our goods and services are sourced from. This is where culture change happens: at the decision-making tables, through courageous leadership, through greater awareness, and a commitment to change.

**Through modern slavery legislation, we can be part of empowering people out of poverty and making a global impact on modern slavery.**

It can be challenging for Australian and international organisations to understand new compliance requirements of local modern slavery legislations, which is why we have developed the STOP Slavery Model. While legislations and specific requirements may differ from country to country, it is helpful to have a basic framework which companies can use if they wish to post a Modern Slavery Position Statement, or to communicate with key stakeholders.

The STOP Slavery Model includes four key areas: State the risks, Take Action, Outline the consultation process, Propose and improvement plan.

**STATE the risks of modern slavery practices in supply chains and operations.**

We are talking about risks to the people in your supply chains, not the risk to business. Modern Slavery Statements needs to state the risks of modern slavery practices in your supply chains and operations. This can be a confronting step for many organisations,

because slavery can be hidden just below the surface. We need to remove this fear by having constructive conversations and move from compliance to culture change.

As Robin Mellon, Former CEO of the Supply Chain Sustainability School states:

*‘Focus on the people in your supply chain. “Risk” should focus on the risk of harm to people, not just the probability of being found out. If you fight to protect your reputation first, people may suffer. If you fight to protect people, your reputation will probably be protected in the long term.’*

For example, when Australian leading airline QANTAS considered their supply chains, they identified an area of risk of modern slavery to their baggage handlers in Malaysia. After identifying the risk, they put strategies in place to create better working conditions, and established ongoing monitoring systems.

Addressing risks early is not only beneficial for the people within our supply chains, but for the organisations’ reputation as a whole.

In 2019, Australian Westpac Bank received negative media attention for failing to properly address risks to money laundering which was linked to the Online Sexual Exploitation of Children (OSEC). Despite efforts to comply with the Modern Slavery Act in other areas, the organisation’s reputation was damaged, and resulted in the resignation of its CEO. This led to a strategic partnership with an NGO to help to fight OSEC, but sadly the damage had already been done, both to the children and its reputation.

In Australia, charities such as Oxfam and Baptist World Aid, have provided accessible means for the public to access research and rating systems on organisations’ commitments to supply chain transparency and workforce standards. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of organisations’ reputation in this area and a stronger consumer voice is growing in this area.

**TAKE action to assess and address risks, and prove the effectiveness of such actions.**

The Australian Modern Slavery Act requires a training and education component in Modern Slavery Statements. As previously stated, when taken seriously, this educational component has the potential to influence serious culture change.

Companies and consumers around the globe need to explore the issues which can occur in supply chains, expand their understanding of what modern slavery is, and be inspired and equipped to do something about it.

**OUTLINE consultation process with key stakeholders and owned entities.**

Organisation executives and board members need to be engaged and educated about the Modern Slavery Act, in order to provide final approval of statements. This is a critical step to ensure buy in from key stakeholders within an organisation.

Where an organisation is made up of different entities, a consultation process must also exist across entities, even when those entities are based overseas, and may come



under different modern slavery legislation in their home country.

In countries where legislation does not yet exist, organisations have the opportunity to be leaders in supply chain transparency and improvement.

**PROPOSE your improvement strategy.**

It is not enough to simply indicate the organisation is on a journey to transparency. Modern Slavery Statements must state the actions taken to assess and address risks, and prove the effectiveness of such actions. There is strength in this law as it requires year on year improvement, and forces organisations to consider what actions they will continue to take in order to continually improve their modern slavery footprint.

In countries where Modern Slavery legislation does not yet exist, campaigners should keep this in mind – to ensure continual improvement and a deeper level of culture change over time.

While a great deal of responsibility lies with organisations to improve the way people are treated at every level of their business, the voice of consumers is very important.

Consumers can utilise the resources available online and in their country to see how companies they buy from rate in their ethical sourcing practices. Switching products to make a more ethical choice can send a strong message to retailers that consumers will no longer stand for products made by people in slavery.

Now more than any other time in history, consumers and businesses have a chance to make a global impact on modern slavery. By working together on a national and global scale, we all have the potential to free millions of people living in slavery, and STOP slavery for good.

## Panellist Statement

### Ms. Bailey Leuschen (United States of America)

Director for Program & Impact at Girl Up



Bailey Leuschen is the Director for Programs & Impact at Girl Up, an initiative of the United Nations Foundation that has trained and mentored 75,000 teenage girls and college women around the world to be effective changemakers for social good. She is passionate and committed to women and girls' social, political, and economic inclusion at home and abroad. Bailey's professional portfolio has spanned the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, including projects for gender equality, democratic governance, impactful civil society, and LGBTQI rights. Bailey is a graduate of the London School of Economics.

## Hello and Happy International Women's Day!

My name is Bailey Leuschen and I have the pleasure of serving as the Director for Programs & Impact at Girl Up, a girls' leadership development organization, housed within the United Nations Foundation with headquarters in Washington D.C. Girl Up focus is on empowering youth to make progress to achieve SDG 5. For the past 10 years, Girl Up's programming and training on gender equality have reached over 75,000 teenage girls in 120 countries around the world.

What we have been seeing in Generation Z all around the world, is this innate feeling of responsibility and personal accountability, the desire to be active. In the United States, we have learned from some of our surveying that 70 percent of Generation Z girls feel the responsibility to use their lives to make a difference in the world. So we do not need to convince the youth to get involved – they are already convinced. What we can do and what we strive to is to provide them with the resources, the tools, the international community as well as platforms and opportunities for these girls to elevate their voices on the local and on the global stage.

On this beautiful International Women's Day 2021, I am honored to represent Girl Up at our virtual panel today, focused on "Pathways to an Equal Future: Women Inspiring Change."

The global IWD theme this year is "Choose to Challenge". At Girl Up, every single day is IWD. The girls are challenging the status quo, the sexist norms in their communities and schools, they are changing the patriarchy and changing the world, which makes it such an honour to serve them. Every single day is a day for championing the contributions of women and girls around the world. We believe in the power of youth to change the world. Many of our Girl Up members first heard about us when they were learning about the incredible work of Malala and they were

realizing that there was a girl who might have been from a different country but she was making that change in the world. What Girl Up strives to do is to provide girls with this vision “If you can see it, you can be it”, making sure that girls of all races, all ethnicities, all genders, all sexualities, all abilities, all nationalities are able to understand that they have the innate power within them to change the world.

Worldwide, teenage girls worldwide can engage in starting a Girl Up Club, where they can channel their passion for making gender equality a reality. We have had over 4,000 different groups of youth start Girl Up Clubs in 120 different countries around the world over the past 10 years. We have new Clubs being created every single day. This signature Girl Up program is free and accessible to any girl, anywhere. After joining our online community, youth may connect with their peers around the world and learn from one another. In addition, youth will access a host of resources to increase their knowledge on different gender equality issue areas, including but not limited to education, safety, how to close the gender gap in the STEM fields, in the Sports fields, how to be effective Storytellers for Social Change, how to organize, fundraise, as well as how to take effective activism for gender equality at the national and global scale.

In addition to creating Clubs, girls around the world are eligible to apply to become one of 25 Girl Up Teen Advisors. Girl Up has now had 10 different classes of Teen Advisors, our premiere girls’ leadership program for teen girls who serve a one-year term as our advisors and champions. In fact, Girl Up’s Teen Advisor applications are open now until March 15.

Last but not least, Girl Up hosts our free annual Leadership Summit every July. Traditionally, it was held in Washington D.C., however, in 2020, we held our first virtual Summit, which was attended by over 30k changemakers in 130 countries around the world. This year, our Leadership Summit will be held online July 13-14. Previous speakers have included:

- Former First Lady Michelle Obama
- Meghan Markle, The Duchess of Sussex
- Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
- Nadia Murad, 2018 Nobel Peace Laureate, UN Goodwill Ambassador, and Founder and President of Nadia’s Initiative
- Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and Founder of LeanIn.Org
- Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women
- Amanda Gorman, National Youth Poet Laureate and Activist,

and so many more – in addition to our youth changemakers who also speak during the Summit.

To learn more, please, visit our website [girlup.org](https://girlup.org). Thank you so much!

## Panellist Statement

### Dr. Coralanne Griffith-Hunte (United States of America)

Human, Industrial and Trauma Psychologist, Founder of Created for Greatness Leadership Group, Inc.



Dr. Coralanne Griffith-Hunte is a Human, Industrial & Trauma Psychologist. She's the Founder and Chairwoman of Created for Greatness Leadership Group, Inc., a humanitarian organization with partnerships in the United States and abroad. In 2020, Dr. Griffith-Hunte joined the United Nations 58th Commission for Social Development to end homelessness around the world. In 2018, Dr. Griffith-Hunte was instrumental in advocating for the End Child Sex Trafficking Bill which was signed into legislation. Dr. Griffith-Hunte is the recipient of copious humanitarian, public service, leadership and educational awards and has appeared on TEDx and well-known publications.

International Women's Rights Day allows our global community to participate in courageous conversations. The Geneva Centre's theme "Pathways to an Equal Future: Women Inspiring Change" is the catalyst to truly shape the context of this conversation. As a global community, we must acknowledge both the impactful contributions that women have made while addressing the exploitation that women and girls continue to face around the world.

Desmond Tutu once said, "My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together." Indeed, those words should have permanent citizenship within the chambers of our hearts. Knowing that no one walks this journey of life without the need of having intimate human experiences and community.

As a Human, Industrial & Trauma Psychologist, I founded Created for Greatness Leadership Group, Inc., a humanitarian organization because I believe that everyone is essential to humanity regardless of culture, gender, religion, race or trauma. Therefore, I work on a daily basis with key government officials and other organizations at the state, local and federal levels to pass legislation favorable for the educational, human rights, mental health, anti-domestic violence, anti-human trafficking, anti-gang, prison reform, community engagement and empowerment mission for New York State families and the global community.

For the past 25 years, I have utilized my platform to advocate for laws to be enforced to protect women and children against human trafficking, domestic violence and all forms of injustices. In 2018, I was instrumental in advocating for the End Child Sex Trafficking Bill that was signed into legislation. The United Nations defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons,

by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery, or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs.

According to the International Labor Organization, it is estimated that over 40 million people are enslaved around the world. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by human trafficking, accounting for an estimated 71% (29MM). Human trafficking has severe traumatic effects on the individual(s) involved. Research shows that trauma is the response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel the full range of emotions and experiences.

Trauma has no boundaries with regards to age, gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Individuals with histories of trauma, toxic stress, and adversity are generally dealing with the consequences of acuity. Instead, they are dealing with the consequences of having multiple systems affecting each other, creating changes in body, behavior, social/emotional, and spiritual aspects of their lives.

Trauma isn't only what has happened to an individual, we must also acknowledge what trauma does inside of the individual. In all trafficking situations complex trauma occurs and effects the body on every level. It removes the ability to self-regulate and once this occurs the victim's cognitive perception is dismantled. How someone responds to a traumatic experience is personal. Therefore, as a psychologist, I bring insight through my training and development conferences that there's no "One size fits all" to explain the traumatic experience of human trafficking.

Nelson Mandela reminds us with the words, "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." I fight for the freedom for those who have experienced the atrocities of human trafficking, I fight for the freedom for those who have experienced the traumatic loss of a loved one due to senseless violence, I fight for those who are the victims of domestic violence, I fight for those communities that are plagued with drugs and poverty, for we must understand that an injustice to one is indeed an injustice to us all.

In order for us to ascertain pathways to an equal future, we must make the decision to fight for the women and girls around the world to ensure their safety and give value to their existence. Every female was created uniquely for a divine purpose. They individually make up the wonderful masterpiece of divine human existence. They are valuable and irreplaceable. The treasure of their purpose shouldn't be determined according to their labor or gender, but rather highlighting the beauty of their intellect,

innovation and uniqueness while creating a world that's safe for their souls to show up.

### **Questions by participants to Dr. Coralanne Griffith-Hunte**

*Do you believe that people are still too afraid to come forward and give their experiences due to the lack of services available that can fully understand how to help women who have lived through traumas? And how can changes be made to progress in this area? Especially if it is not an important agenda for the political parties in power at any given time.*

I do believe that some women experience fear in coming forward because society has not always created a safe space for this type of courageous dialogue to occur. Research shows that women have experienced negative repercussions because they shared their truth. Blaming victims creates a lack of trust for both institutions and individuals, which suppresses women from expressing their traumatic experiences and beginning their journey to healing.

Trauma isn't an easy topic for most women to discuss because of guilt and shame. Many women experienced trauma within their childhood (e.g., emotional & sexual abuse, domestic violence, homelessness, physical & emotional neglect, discrimination, mental illness, and poverty) and never shared their experience with anyone.

Research on Adverse Childhood experiences (ACE's) indicates that the toxic stress during childhood can harm the most basic levels of the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems. Such exposures can even alter the physical structure of DNA (epigenetic effects).

In addition, research also connects childhood trauma to a variety of negative outcomes in adulthood such as substance abuse, risky behaviors, incarceration, and suicide. The habits of trauma generally leads to patterns that have dramatic physiological impact in our bodies and ultimately dictate our very own quality of life.

In an effort to create change, there must be a multi-generational and stakeholder trauma-informed care approach. A trauma-informed approach reflects adherence to six key principles:

- Realization & Safety
- Recognition, Trustworthiness & Transparency
- Collaboration & Mutuality
- Empowerment of Voice and Choice
- Respond with Cultural, Historical and Gender Respect.
- Resist Re-traumatization

We must also look to create policies that denounce and dismantle the over sexualization within the media, women being viewed as sexual objects, the normalization of violence against women that violate their human rights. And lastly, promote a safe

space for women to not only share their lived experiences but also to be believed.

***How many children per year are trafficked for sexual purposes in the USA (and worldwide if you know)?***

1 in 7 children reported by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children become victims of sexual trafficking. It's important to understand that the majority of victims are trafficked within the borders of their own country. An estimated 58 percent in 2016, an increase from just 27 percent in 2010. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Recognizing that there is domestic trafficking within the United States will allow for better report rates, prevention, and rehabilitation for those who have been trafficked.

There is not an exact number of children trafficked because there are cases there are unreported. However, there is an estimate of 10,000 children that are trafficked for sex purposes in the U.S each year.

**Source:**

<https://love146.org/>

Child Trafficking in the U.S. Happens in All 50 States (unicefusa.org)

<https://polarisproject.org/blog/2020/08/what-we-know-about-how-child-sex-trafficking-happens/>

It is estimated that between 18,000 and 20,000 victims are trafficked into the United States annually.

Source: [womenscenter4yfs.org](https://womenscenter4yfs.org)

Worldwide: 40 million people are being victimized in situations of trafficking and exploitation. 25% of these are children. 25% = 10,000,000

Source: <https://love146.org/>

Additional information:

Children raised in foster care have a greater chance of becoming victims. In 2013, 60% of child victims the FBI recovered were from foster care. In 2017, 14% of children reported missing were likely victims of sex trafficking, and 88% of those had been in child welfare, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reported.

Source: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

***Has your government implemented a program to monitor children trafficked for sexual purposes?***

The FBI addresses human trafficking through its Crimes Against Children Programs. The Violent Crimes Against Children Section (VCACS). VCACS has made domestic sex trafficking of minors a priority under the Innocence Lost National Initiative, started in 2003 in conjunction with CEOS and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. VCACS's work to fight child sex trafficking encompasses:



- Seventy-four Child Exploitation Task Force Investigating online sexual exploitation of children and child sex trafficking.
- Operation Cross Country (OCC), a nationwide law enforcement initiative to recover minors who are commercially sexually exploited. OCC expanded internationally in 2016, and included Canadian, Cambodian, Thai, and Filipino law enforcement.
- The Innocent Images National Initiative, a proactive, intelligence-driven, multi-agency, international operation to combat the proliferation and production of child pornography worldwide.
- The Child Sex Tourism Initiative targeting U.S. citizens traveling abroad to engage in sexual activity with children.
- The Child Abduction Rapid Deployment Team, consisting of approximately 80 members, to provide a national law enforcement resource for missing children investigations.
- Project Safe Childhood is a Department of Justice initiative launched in 2006 that aims to combat the proliferation of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation crimes against children.

In January 2020, the White House hosted a Summit on Human Trafficking: Honoring the 20th Anniversary of the TVPA, during which President Trump signed Executive Order 13903 on Combating Human Trafficking and Online Child Exploitation in the United States.



## Panellist Statement

### Ms. Diana Madibekova (United Kingdom)

PhD Researcher and Teaching Fellow

Diana Madibekova is a PhD Researcher and Teaching Fellow. She researches the interdisciplinary field of global governance and regulatory frameworks, causal mechanism between international business and global peace from management perspective, particularly in the role of business in contributing to peaceful societies and how that is (whether) regulated, assessed, and equally important, perceived by the business itself, the state and the society. Outside her formal functions, Diana is a frequent speaker on topics of career management, leadership, women's empowerment and equality, and she hopes to contribute to the betterment of the world where people are defined by who they are, and not what they come to represent.



Thank you. It is a great joy to be a part of this panel and being invited to speak. I will focus on three key points about how we can make the world a more equal and fair place for all.

The first one is 1) the importance of childhood in raising confident children who grow up to be responsible adults respecting others regardless of whether we are parents to girls or boys; we cannot underestimate how crucial it is for children to have happy early years that are transformational and further impact all of their aspects of life. Those memories from what kids see growing up remains with them forever.

Second is the 2) role of the education and career support network; again it is so vital that we invest in the education of girls and boys, as it is the foundational base for their ongoing personal and professional development. Quoting an inspirational figure for me, Christine Lagarde<sup>58</sup> said: *“make sure to focus on your education, train yourself and accumulate knowledge; you are not going to succeed alone, you need to forge alliances with workmates, with family partners”*. I also resonate with what she voiced about her mother who has been a huge influence for her, and I can say the same.

My mother is always there for me, she has been the driving force of my resilience and growth, everything that I am is because I have an educated, wise, powerful yet down-to-earth mother.

The third one is 3) women should create allies at the workplace and advance their careers from early on. Women need to speak up, promote and self-praise themselves, even when no one believes in them or in their work or that they are capable of

58. Official page of Christine Lagarde on Instagram, [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bt\\_e59ZglZw/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bt_e59ZglZw/)

leadership. According to the World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law* report<sup>59</sup> published recently, which measures how laws and regulations across 190 economies impact women's working lives, it has been found that despite some improvement in indicators across some countries, women still have less legal rights than men on average globally. This is a concerning picture and we need to be doing everything we can to change that. Yet in order to build an equal world, where gender doesn't define one's opportunities or chances of success in life, all of us collectively would need to understand that when one of us is left behind, everyone loses.

So gender equality is not about kicking men off the table. It is about making the table larger. Gender equality is not about prioritising and empowering only women. It is about untying the personality and power of a character from one's gender. And it is not about creating constant competition of who is better or stronger, but it is about cooperation and communication between groups, the narratives of which would have to be re-written or redefined. Speaking of which, are you the only author of your story? You might have co-authors in writing your story and narrative, but remember that, even in times of crisis and chaos, to have independence of mind and be the main author of the story you are telling yourself and about yourself to the world. Thank you!

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59. World Bank. 2020. *Women, Business and the Law* 2020. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32639> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

## Written Contribution

### Mr. Sayed Ahmad Fahim Masoumi (Afghanistan)

Founder of Voice National Development Organization

Sayed Ahmad Fahim Masoumi has a career background as Country Director for AIESEC in Afghanistan, International Relations Consultant for AIESEC in Vietnam, and founder of VNDO organization in Afghanistan. He believes in teamwork, leadership, and a results-oriented working environment by keeping gender equality a driver for growth. His experiences have covered projects in Afghanistan, India, Bahrain, and Egypt. He is pursuing his Master's degree in Sustainable Development Management at Hochschule Rhein Waal University in Germany.



I am Sayed Ahmad Fahim Masoumi, founder of Voice National Development Organization and speaking here about gender equality in Afghanistan and globally. Afghanistan has been experiencing decades of war and instability. Women's engagement and role within Afghanistan society have been developing slightly in politics, economics, health, and education sectors. As we all know, a country's economy depends on the number of active businesses, and these businesses contribute to the country's GDP. In the first wave of Covid-19, several small and medium firms got closed due to the government's partial lockdown, and as in every other country, many men and women lost their jobs. It is noteworthy that women's involvement in the business sector has not been much tangible in Afghanistan. There are several traditional barriers on their way to face them and pass them with courage. We have women who are championing to make a difference in government, the private sector, NGOs, and civil societies. In the government system, we have only three women as ministers out of 26 ministries, and 68 seats out of 250 in the parliament of Afghanistan are dedicated to women. This alarms for a systematic change from the government leadership to close gender gaps.

In August 2020, I, with my colleagues, organized Rural Women's Entrepreneurship program and selected 25 ongoing women-led businesses for a series of theory and practical capacity-building programs. At the time of the program, these women-led small businesses were managed with less customer market and productivity. In the first days, we witnessed how passionate and confident they are for learning new modern methods and how they have been left behind despite millions of international aid and funding for women empowerment projects. In three months, we transformed their businesses from a traditional context to a more developed way. Now, they have their own social media pages. They can do marketing with flyers and brochures; they have increased the percentage of their sales, have a basic business plan on, and lead,

engage and inspire their fellow women and our society.

I learned from this experience that we should not only focus on theoretical concepts of women empowerment by putting some slides for them and calling it women empowerment. It is being followed mostly in my country, and I am sure it happens in other developing countries too. But, we should find such potential gaps, equip them with practical resources, and ensure that they are now independent in the work they do. Also, women in Afghanistan face violence in their homes, and in most parts of the country, there is no access to justice and primary healthcare. Still, there are traditional norms by male-dominated groups who see working women as a humiliation to themselves.

### Gender as Global Issue

Coming to pathways to an equal future as a global issue, we should tackle gender equality topics according to a country's social, geopolitical, and cultural norms. It can be challenging to bring methods tackling women's violence in Brazil to a country like Afghanistan. Next, gender equality should be part of developing countries' school curriculum to train not only a nation but generations. Mostly we have ignored essential policy intervention, which in this men-dominated world, we have not invested in training men to accept women's rights as equal humankind. If we cannot train the whole nation because of its costs, at least we can train government officials by allocating a specific budget from each ministry to this cause and expand this culture. Wise men can take a bold step and fight for generation equality by educating themselves about gender equality and starting it from their own families. This way, everyone in the family is a gender advocate, and step by step can influence neighbors, relatives, communities, and nations.

It is a smart approach and beneficial for an organization to use from men and women. One of the factors in gender equality is to keep the balance of gender diversity in our workforce without imposing any prejudiced actions to their potential. Women's participation in the 21st century has increased in the global labor market. This growth has created various teamwork stations in multiple industries across our world, which the result can be seen in a dramatic rise in the quantity and quality of their work productivity. According to a survey in Poland, it was found that in leadership, men are hard-hearted in attaining the given goal, take risks comprehensively, are very skilled in leading teams, and take swift decisions in a short time compared to women. However, women are found to be more cooperative in teamwork, more alert in identifying the sentiments and equipped with more carefulness than men (Wilk, 2011). Having inclusive women participation in the economic sector can help countries, communities, and families transform their overall economies and GDP. Gender equality with access to equal opportunities globally in the labor market can increase the global economy to \$160 trillion (WB, 2018). The businesses following both genders in leading positions have an advantage compared to those who fail to. These businesses have indicated 48% more operational performance, business

development level is 42% further, incomes have received 45% added value, and their decision-making art is 73% more result-oriented (Garijo, 2019).

Globally our mean gender gap is 31.4%, mostly in two potential areas, political and economic participation. As of now, 25% of 35,127 parliament and senate seats are led by women, and from 3,343 ministries, 21% counts for women as a minister. There has been no woman as president or prime minister in 85 countries in the past 50 years. Coming to private sectors, worldwide only 36% are in leadership as a manager. In the labor market, we have 78% of men dominance and 55% of women, which the wage gap is still an issue by 40% difference compared to men in the same industry, and income difference is 50%. Women have less access to loans, subsidies, and financial supports to start a startup or invest in an area of interest. Globally, the mean to close these gaps in 107 territories requires 99.5 years. In 2020, it was projected that the time required to complete the gender gaps varies from one region to another. Western Europe requires 54 years, Latin America and the Caribbean 59 years, South Asia 71 years, Sub Saharan Africa 95 years, Eastern Europe and Central Asia 107 years, the Middle East and North Africa 140 years, North America 151 years, and East Asia and the Pacific 163 years (WEF, 2020).

Covid-19 is a setback and illustrates policy failure in terms of gender equality, which no one has predicted that when a pandemic hit us, then what is plan B to keep gender balance. Many women lost their jobs, and during lockdowns, several gender-based violence was reported globally. In post-Covid time the number of years mentioned before may increase and take years to get back to the average pace we used to have in our lives, businesses and projections. The breakthrough will be educating women with practical concepts, leading them toward group entrepreneurship, encouraging men to take initiative and support women's right and including gender subject in schools' curriculum.

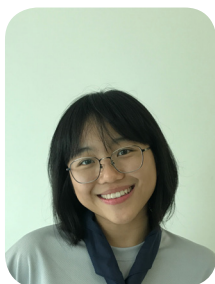
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## Panellist Statement

### Ms. Tan Ejin (Malaysia)

*Advocacy Champion at the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)*



Tan Ejin is a second-year law student. She was involved with the End Child Marriage campaign with Girl Guides Association of Malaysia and is currently an Advocacy Champion at the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), where she has worked on gender-based violence and body confidence issues. In the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), she and her team will be involved as youth delegates.

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, to everyone wherever you are. I am Ejin from Malaysia, a young leader in my national girl guides association and currently an Advocacy Champion at WAGGGS.

Child marriages have been an ongoing issue in my country for a very long time for various reasons. But it wasn't until 2018 when the news of a 41-year-old man marrying an 11-year-old girl that put the issue under international spotlight.

When I started learning about child marriages, I realised how lucky I was because I was born in a family that didn't marry me off when I was 11, 12, 13. I got to attend school, pursue my education, and currently a university degree. I could be a child without the responsibilities of being a wife or a mother. I had a childhood, a childhood that I took for granted.

Seeing how childhood has become a privilege to some, I feel angry because how can they be robbed of their education, their opportunities just like that?

In 2018, the Girl Guides Association of Malaysia (GGAM) organised an Advocacy workshop on ending child marriage and I had the opportunity to be part of it. We learned about the root causes, its impact and brainstormed on campaign ideas and identified key decision-makers. It was a really eye-opening experience for me because I didn't know that child marriage is linked to so many underlying issues in our society, there is poverty, sexual education, legal enforcements, social norms.

My group designed a campaign that would incorporate the theme of ending child marriage in our bi-annual public speaking competition. We believe it is important to give girls and young women a stage to talk about this issue. While I wasn't involved in the competition organisation, I was able to lend my voice as a participant and share my thoughts on the topic.

In terms of raising awareness and challenging societal norms surrounding child marriages, GGAM also held a myriad of activities, including Stop The Violence

workshops, poster workshops which resulted in an exhibition of very powerful works of art, multi-stakeholder collaborations with other organisations,

The Girl Guides in Malaysia also had a protest in front of the Malaysian Parliament and handed over 156,000 petition signatures calling for the increase of the minimum age of marriage in all states to 18.

Just recently, I had a meeting with the Malaysia's Permanent Mission to the UN Representatives as a delegate to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). CSW is a functional commission under one of the UN organs, ECOSOC, where member states come together to promote gender equality and women empowerment. One of the themes for CSW this year is the elimination of violence against women. As delegates, we lobby on what we want to be included in the policy: what is left out in the draft and what needs to be more specific. Although it doesn't explicitly spell out as ending child marriage, but all this is important because GBV is interlinked to child marriage and with this piece of international policy, we then get to inform and advocate to our decision makers here in Malaysia. We are all hopeful that our proposed languages survive the negotiation rounds later.

At this point, you might be thinking woo, ending child marriage is really difficult and you're just one small person without much impact to make, let me assure you that I also struggled with that, the idea of dead aid.

But I realised that, if everyone thinks that way, then we give ourselves the excuse of not doing something about child marriage every day. You are never too small to make an impact, every act counts. If you shared about it on social media today, you help to create awareness. You may even empower someone in your audience to take action too. And if each of us can empower at least one person to take action, then that is a whole lot of people we're talking about.

With that said, I urge each and every one of you to leave this meeting by giving yourself the permission to make an impact, no matter how small you may think it is, it will change someone's life. And childhood is a right, not a privilege.

Thank you.



## Panellist Statement

### **Ms. Mohamed Azhar Fathima Ajra (Sri Lanka)**

*Pro-bono lawyer and Legal Associate at Ameen Law Chamber, Puttalam, Sri Lanka*



Mohamed Azhar Fathima Ajra served as the Assistant Lecturer in Law at the University of Jaffna and was parallelly engaged in several volunteer activities to demolish disparity, ensure equality and to foster human rights. As a Project Manager at the International Youth Council Sri Lankan Chapter, she served the vulnerable youth and women in various aspects. At present, she is providing pro bono legal service to the women and children affected by domestic violence, maintenance issues and child rights at Quazi Court and enforcement at Magistrate Courts.

She is a Legal Associate at Ameen Law Chamber, Puttalam, Sri Lanka, since October 2020.

Greetings from Sri Lanka. Good morning/afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to quickly introduce myself. I am Ajra Azhar, I am a lawyer and a former assistant lecturer in law at the University of Jaffna. One of the oldest public university in Sri Lanka. At present, I am providing pro bono legal service to the women and children affected by domestic violence, maintenance issues and child rights. Also, I am a Legal Associate at Ameen Law Chamber, Puttalam, Sri Lanka.

Before I start, I'd like to provide an outline for my talk.

Firstly; I would like to discuss "Women in Leadership". Secondly; present context of Gender Equality in Sri Lanka. Thirdly; progress and information of SDG 5 – with reference to the Sri Lankan perspective. Finally; the measures to accelerate the SDG 5 and to achieve generation equality

Firstly, while considering the Women in Leadership;

Women of the world want and deserve an equal future free from stigma, stereotypes and violence; a future that's sustainable, peaceful, with equal rights and opportunities for all. To get us there, the world needs women at every table where decisions are being made. Women's full and effective participation and leadership in of all areas of life drives progress for everyone.

Secondly, if we focus on the present context of Gender Equality in Sri Lanka;

Of course, Sri Lankans never miss the opportunity of reminding the world Sri Lanka holds the first place in electing a woman as Prime Minister, and that too way back in 1960. Perhaps the police department of Sri Lanka has forgotten, or would rather prefer not to know that Sri Lanka's women were amongst the first in Asia to win the right to vote. And that was way back in 1931!



However, with structural barriers and societal norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes and biases, women continue to be underrepresented and discriminated in the economic, political and social spheres.

Thirdly, while considering the progress and information of SDG 5;

In Sri Lanka, women's labour force participation rate is at a mere 32.5% in comparison to 72.4% for men. This is often compounded by many factors such as the lack of affordable and quality childcare services, lack of support in sharing household work and some workplace cultures that are not supportive of women employees.

Considering the Women's leadership and political participation, at present, women in Sri Lanka are largely underrepresented in politics. Only 5.3% – 12 out of 225 legislators – in the Sri Lankan Parliament are women. Despite early achievements, the representation of women legislators at the national level has never exceeded 7% throughout Sri Lanka's electoral history since 1931.

Finally; how to accelerate the SDG 5 to accomplish generation equality;

We can achieve gender balance through a tri-sector effort. Governments, companies, and society, which make up this key trifecta, must work together to unlock this potential.

The first actor, the Government, which must build on ongoing efforts to bring more women into the workforce and particularly into senior positions.

Companies also have big roles to play in creating gender balance. In Asia-Pacific, only about a quarter of managerial positions or higher is held by women, while in Sri Lanka, the ratio rises to about a third.

We need cultural change to break gender gridlock. Society generally is the last tri-sector element. Deeply rooted attitudes play an integral part in limiting the potential of women, and an investment in public awareness to shift social norms and help ease the path for working women.

Education and awareness are crucial. Schools could consider ways to remove gender bias and work in tandem with companies, for instance in sponsorship and mentoring programs for women, to encourage women to participate more broadly in the economy. Such measures could encourage a change in attitudes among policymakers, business people, and society generally that is necessary to smooth the path toward gender parity not patriarchy!

We should achieve not only gender equality but also generation equality.

Thank you!

## Written Contribution

### Ms. Hira Amjad (Pakistan)

*Founder and Campaign Director of ‘DASTAK – Knock-down Gender-based Violence’*



Hira Amjad is a Founder and Campaign Director of ‘DASTAK – Knock-down Gender-based Violence’, Hira has been working to eradicate gender-based violence and to promote women’s rights across Pakistan since 2014. She specializes in development and execution of grassroots level community engagement, awareness-raising and social mobilization development projects. Hira has worked extensively with women and young girls across Pakistan, including those residing in various districts of former war-torn Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). She is also a fellow of Cross Culture Program (Germany) on Human Rights and Peace.

Very happy International Women’s Day to all of you from Pakistan!

Pakistan is considered as the fifth most dangerous country for women in the world (Thomas Reuters Foundation). It is ranked 151 out of 153 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index Report (2020), published by the World Economic Forum (WEF). Not just that, around 5000 cases of domestic violence are registered every year in the country, 150+ cases of acid attacks and more than thousand women are murdered in the name of honor (Human Rights Commission Pakistan). However, the height of insensitivity is that, the aforementioned statistics don’t include the large number of unreported cases. DASTAK Foundation’s extensive on-ground work helped us realize that, lack of awareness regarding women’s rights (at societal level and among women themselves) is one of the major reasons for the self-perpetuating vicious cycle of violence (as time and again expressed by the survivors themselves), especially in far flung and backward regions.

The team, through listening to stories of survivors of violence uncovered that, the intensity of the situation is as such that, often it is also invisible to those experiencing the violence. The information, knowledge and access gap make the situation even worse; most of the women are either unaware of various laws safeguarding their rights or unable to reach the right avenues to seek help. The women (who have come forward) often lament that, if only they were aware about the existing essential services options, they would have left the abusive households sooner. Just to quote a few on-ground experiences, during informal FGDs conducted at universities and religious seminaries (women-only) nationwide it was observed that females aren’t aware of any distress helpline that can protect them from violence and abuse. Not just that, majority of the times (even if they want to come forward) they are discouraged by their friends, family members or acquaintances.

DASTAK's work advocates a change in approach and strategy vis-à-vis dealing with GBV in Pakistan, wherein there needs to be a shift in the narrative and the need to look at women, not as victims, but survivors, actors and agents of change. I strongly believe that, dismantling gender stereotypes, such as ideals linking masculinity to the provider role and macho behavior as well as ideals linking femininity to chastity, submission and victimhood and normalizing consent and space can go a long way in halting GBV. Furthermore, re-strategizing bystander prevention, engaging men as key stakeholders and empowering young girls to reclaim their agency can also contribute positively to the elimination of gender-based violence. Lastly, a clear emphasis on survivor centered approach (prioritizing the rights, needs and wished of the survivor) and creation of healing circles and safe spaces for young women can be the much-needed first steps in this regard. At DASTAK we strongly believe in listening to, standing with and empowering survivors of violence as changemakers in the society.

DASTAK Foundation, over the course of last few years, has conducted extensive community engagement, awareness-raising and social mobilization against gender-based violence. The work has also shed light on the importance of building synergies, networks and collaborations that can help us maximize our outreach and impact. Therefore, DASTAK Foundation launched TABEER Network on International Women's Day, 2021, a network of South Asia based women rights organizations in order to collectively work towards elimination of gender-based violence. TABEER, an Urdu word, means 'manifestation of your dream'. TABEER Network has organizations from six South Asian countries and is certainly growing. The network aspires to conduct digital media advocacy against gender-based violence through capitalizing on the power of social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram and others.

Finally, towards the end, I would like to stress once again that, if 1 billion of the world's population is suffering through a problem such as gender-based violence, I think it is about time that we take it seriously and face it upfront. The societies and governments need to introduce structural and systemic reforms that wouldn't just bring about temporary relief from the problem, but would eliminate it altogether. However, for that to happen, we must unite our resources, ideas and ideologies and collectively introduced creative interventions. "It is time for us to stop being politely angry", it is time that we face this menace head on, together.



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