

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 50th SESSION

Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women

27 June 2022

Panel 1

Exploring the nexus between climate change and violence against women and girls through a human rights lens

During her opening remarks, **Ms. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights** affirmed that climate change threatens us all. However, it is women and girls who often suffer its harshest and most violent consequences. Indeed, when women are displaced, they are at far greater risk of violence, including sexual violence, human trafficking, and child, early and forced marriage. **Ms. Michelle Bachelet**, while welcoming the international attention on climate change's impact on women and girls. She called for urgent actions and focus on the grave issue of violence against women and girls which has been exacerbated by the climate crisis. She also suggested few steps that States should take, in order to not to leave no one behind: 1) acknowledge the **link between climate change and violence against** women, including against indigenous women, women of African descent, Roma women, women from religious minorities, women with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ women; 2) **include and involve women in decision-making**, planning and implementation of approaches to climate action; 3) strengthen the design and effective implementation of **gender-responsive environmental and disaster risk reduction policies**, programmes and budgets; 4) enhance accountability frameworks; and 5) **respect, protect and fulfil human rights obligations to women and girls**, and in particular women environmental human rights defenders.

The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Reem Alsalem, moderated the panel discussion. **Ms. Melania Chiponda, Climate Justice and Gender Advisor FEMNET** focused on **gender-based violence against women leaders and environmental human rights defenders**. In particular, she explained to the Council that when women stand up against environmental destruction, pollution and dispossession, they are speaking out against unjust power in the hands of institutions such as politics, economics, social and culture; and society retaliates with violence against the women. Considering the particular situation in **Africa**, Ms. Chiponda affirmed that when corporations, with support from government, come in to take over land and resources, **women, indigenous groups and peasants push back to reclaim them, endangering their lives**. **Ms. Astrid Puentes Riaño, independent consultant on human rights and climate change**, focused on the **interlink between climate-induced displacement and migration and the risks of violence against women**. She affirmed that migration and forced displacement are some of the most serious impacts of the climate crisis that are already affecting millions of people on the planet. She stressed that repressive policies, security threats and damage caused by climate change contribute to migration, and women and girls sexual violence. Stressing that **climate change disasters are not natural but linked to human activities**, she affirmed that differentiated actions and an intersectional perspective are essential to prevent the exponential increase in migration and displacement. It is also essential to increase and strengthen

political will at all levels and achieve the implementation of international agreements with human and women's rights at the centre. **Mr. Rajib Ghosal, Regional Senior Technical Advisor, Save the Children International, Climate Change and Child Poverty Focal Point in the Asia-Pacific region** underlined that the **immediate and long-term impacts of climate change impact women and girls**, especially those living in vulnerable situations, in low, middle-income countries and small island developing states who play a vital role in rural economies. Women and girls face intersecting forms of **inequality and discrimination**. He called on States and UN partners to promote rights-based, age- and gender-responsive approaches in climate-resilient agricultural policies. He called on the international community to ensure women and girls participation in climate change policy, influencing platforms and decision-making processes in context of gaining access to land tenure, water rights, managing natural resources and livestock. States should address gender norms and promote social and behavioral strategies and influence communities to change negative social, gender norms and attitudes towards women and girls; as well as invest in shock-responsive social protection measures. States should create a **protective environment and safe spaces to seek psycho-social support** and lodge confidential complaints against perpetrators, allowing them to recover from the trauma of climate-induced disasters and emotional, physical, sexual abuse. **Esmeralda, Peruvian girl advocate and national delegate of the National Movement of Organized Working Children and Adolescents of Peru**, focused on **climate-induced problems in agriculture** (poor harvest, livestock loss, land loss, loss of livelihoods, etc.) **and the risks of domestic violence, child early and forced marriage, trafficking in persons and forced prostitution**. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to suffer gender-based violence, economic violence, physical and psychological violence as well as human trafficking and early child and forced marriage. She also asserted that women and girls experience disproportionate effects of climate change globally. Women and girls are often left out of school or unable to work. She finally conveyed some key recommendations to Member States and UN agencies, including promoting gender equality in agriculture so that women and girls can carry out this activity without fear of violence; and guaranteeing safe spaces for women and girls participation in decision-making climate change policies.

Interactive dialogue

23 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. In particular, the majority of the countries shared national best practices, initiatives, programs and laws and policies aimed at preventing and addressing violence against women in the context of climate change and natural disasters. Different segments of the women population were taken into account, including migrants, indigenous, children and LGBTIQ. **Türkiye** spoke about the effects of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls and how the climate exacerbates existing violence and discrimination against them. **Ecuador, Afghanistan and Benin** referred to how climate change interacts with existing conflict, fuelling it. Countries, such as **Spain, Pakistan and Australia** considered that response to climate change is linked to the women, peace and security agenda. Moreover, **Canada** stressed that climate crisis impacts are not gender-neutral, therefore putting human rights at the centre of any response to it will be effective. **Colombia** indicated that the global effort to deal with the climate crisis offers an opportunity to eradicate and deal with violence against women and gender inequalities. In this vein, **Timor-Leste** affirmed that violence against women is a crisis within a climate change crisis.

NGOs reported to the Council data and figures of violence, discriminations and marginalization of women and girls across the world. They affirmed that an intersectional gender-response approach is needed. They also called on states and the international community to ensure women access to sexual and reproductive health care services. Sexual and reproductive health should be recognized as an imperative element of climate change adaptation and resilience. NGOs also highlighted that women and girls in all of their diversities are agents of change and must be empowered to participate in discussions and decision-making processes.

Country delegations and NGOs posed **comments and questions** related to effective ways to protect the right of women and girls; good practices to address gender-based violence and climate change crises, as well as, ways to include women in decision-making processes. In response, **panellists** reported Guatemala as a successful example of women participation in decision-making processes and climate change discussions. According to them, even though women participate at a high rate at the national level, there is a very low rate at the international level.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (23 country delegations):

Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium (on behalf of Benelux Countries), Benin, Canada, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire (on behalf of the group of African States), Ecuador, European Union, France, Guyana (on behalf of Caribbean Community, CARICOM, the member state representative in Geneva), Lithuania, Mauritania, Norway (on behalf of NB8 Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden), Pakistan (on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation), Portugal (on behalf of Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, Timor-Leste), Qatar, Slovenia (on behalf of Trilateral Group Austria, Croatia, Slovenia), Spain, Timor-Leste, Togo, Türkiye (on behalf of Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Türkiye and Australia), United States

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor (6):

Center For Global Nonkilling, International Planned Parenthood Federation, Plan International, Inc., Asian Pacific Resource And Research Centre For Women, European Region Of The International Lesbian And Gay Federation, World Vision International

International organizations (1): UN Women.

To watch full meeting refer to [UN Web TV](#).

Panel 2

Human rights-based and gender-responsive care and support systems

In her opening statements, **Ms. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights** focused on the notion of **care, as a fundamental** for the full enjoyment of human rights and for a life with dignity and autonomy. However, too often, care and support systems across many societies are unrecognised, undervalued and dramatically underfunded. In particular, children and persons with disabilities may be affected by a lack of affordable and quality pre-primary education and care, as well as adequate community support or respite care. Men and women should share the responsibility for the provision of care. Conversely, in most societies, it is taken for granted that this vital work be provided for free by women and girls. This implies a major impact on their human rights. Stressing that, this is the time to invest in human rights-based and gender-responsive public care and support systems. She called on the international community to **respect the autonomy** of people receiving care and support; to **recognise the value of care work**, reflecting it in economic policies; to **reduce the care burden** by improving basic infrastructure; to **redistribute care work**, by dismantling gender stereotypes; and to build a fair and equal system with the strong and meaningful **participation of women and girls**, in all their diversity.

H.E. Ms. Elizabeth Gómez Alcorta, Ministry of Women, Genders and Diversity of Argentina, in her remarks, stressed that the meeting represents an important milestone for the development of a **joint agenda on care work at the international level**. An agenda that seeks to guarantee the right to care, to be cared for, and to self-care, and that lays down the guidelines for the development of ambitious policies, aimed at modifying the material basis of gender inequality that, as we know, is to a great extent caused by inequalities in the sphere of care work. The current social organization of care work reproduces social and gender inequalities. She presented to the Council **Argentinean concrete policies and actions**. She affirmed that gender inequality is a problem that extends beyond geographical borders and requires a **collective approach**. It is essential to strengthen the political agenda and the international legal framework on this matter to create strong international standards that guide public care policies.

Panellists, such as **Ms. Frances Raday, Professor of Law, Hebrew University and President, Concord Research Center for Integration of International Law in Israel**; **Ms. Rosario Galarza, Intersectionalities Officer, International Disability Alliance**; and **Mr. Chidi King, Chief, Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Branch, Conditions of Work and Equality Department, International Labour Organization (ILO)** focused on why the transformation of care is crucial for women's rights, and how this promotes the rights of women with disabilities. In particular, **Ms. Frances Raday** highlighted that provision of care and support for those in need of care such as children, older persons and persons with disabilities, is an essential condition for the thriving of humanity. Care services are currently unpaid or underpaid. This imposes heavy costs on women as carers. The lack of a social protection floor for care services is a major barrier to **women achieving equal economic opportunities**. As a result, she noted that the World Economic Forum has concluded that care subsidies advance gender equality, create new jobs, and increase family income, along with advancing gender equality. This, must be regarded as a core aspect of the state's economic and social obligations. **Ms. Rosario Galarza** asserted that women and girls with disabilities are both the recipients of care and support, and the providers of care and support. In designing and providing support systems for persons with disabilities, States need to address the specific support needs of individuals throughout their life cycle.

This is to acknowledge the different layers of identities within the disability community. Affirming that the lack of support and care for women and girls with disabilities causes lacks of control, choice, freedom, and autonomy, and often leads to sexual and gender-based violence against them; she provided key points for action by States to help transform care and support systems to become gender responsive and human rights-based. Lastly, **Mr. Chidi King** delivered his statement on behalf of the International Labour Organization (ILO). He conveyed ILO principles and activities on care work, care economy and transformative care policies. Care policy packages need to be country-specific, universal and based on solidarity, representation and social dialogue. The report, “*Care at Work*”, reviews progress made over the past decade in national legislation concerning maternity protection, paternity, parental and other care-related leave, as well as in childcare and long-term care services for both the elderly and family members who are disabled. Despite such progress, persistent and significant legal gaps remain.

Interactive dialogue

24 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. Most of the countries reported experiences, policies, and activities aimed at addressing gender inequalities and discrimination through care and support system transformation. **Namibia**, despite the persistence of gaps, challenges and the lack of social protections for rural women, shared policy interventions for the empowerment and support of women and girls. Considering that the Coronavirus crisis has deepened inequalities between men and women socially, politically and economically as well as in care systems, **Iraq** informed the Council on a National Plan to respond to the urgent need to develop women's skills and capacities. In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to revoke constitutional protection for abortion, **Switzerland** expressed strong concern. Reproductive rights are essential for women to enjoy their human rights. States must protect these rights. **Cuba**, in spite of limitations and challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic embargo, had developed many wage and social security measures to protect women at work.

NGOs, reporting cases, data and figures, affirmed that the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of reproductive labor, including care work, as well as has exacerbated pre-existing patterns of gender-based discrimination and patriarchal norms and behaviors. Indeed, women's work remains undervalued, unpaid or not adequately compensated and often unrecognized. They asserted that a conversation on the economy of care and on reproductive labor must include conversations on the exploitation of the free labor provided by women and girls, especially of women and girls of colour and those from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds. In this view, NGOs urged States to respect, protect and fulfill sexual, gender-related and reproductive rights; and to use a substantive equality framework in their economic and social policy-making. This would start redressing the deep impact of gender-based discrimination on women and girls.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (24 country delegations):

Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile (on behalf of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Panama, Mexico, Honduras), European Union, Estonia (on behalf of North Baltic countries), Cuba, Gambia, Georgia, Iraq, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, New Zealand (on behalf of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), South Africa, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Vietnam, Liechtenstein (on behalf of Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland and Liechtenstein), Thailand, Switzerland, Israel, France, Sudan, United Kingdom Of Great Britain And Northern Ireland

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor (5):

Global Initiative For Economic, Social And Cultural Rights, Joint Statement - Defence For Children International, Center For Reproductive Rights, Innc, The, Action Canada For Population And Development, Asociacion Hazteoir.Org

International organizations (1): UN Women.

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