

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL - 50th SESSION

### Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

17 June 2022

**Ms. Meskerem Geset Techane, Member Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls,** presented the thematic report on girls' and young women's activism. She emphasized that girls and young women are at the forefront of initiatives aimed at transforming societies towards social justice, gender equality and sustainability. This is occurring despite the barriers, gender-based discrimination and violence within families, communities and society at large that they continue to face. She affirmed that the empowerment of girls and young women through the respect, protection and fulfilment of their fundamental human rights is an indispensable precondition for just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies, and the achievement of gender equality. She reported that the significant **barriers** to women's and girls' enjoyment of the **rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association** are deeply rooted at home, in the family and in the community. Participation in public life is prevented and punished by patriarchal control and wrongful stereotyping. The lack of safety and security are major barriers to girls' and young women's activism. The frequent occurrence of attacks, harassment and violence in the street and on public transport, deter and limit girls' and young women's activities and travel outside their home. This impedes their access to and use of spaces for activism. **Digital gender-based violence and harassment** add a further layer of challenges to girls' and young women's activism.

Other **human rights barriers** to girls' and young women's activism are related to early and forced marriages as well as forced, unwanted or child pregnancies, female genital mutilation, sexual violence, including rape, curtailed access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and goods, including those related to menstrual health, contraception and abortion, the denial of their autonomy in relation to these matters. **Access to education**, especially at secondary and tertiary levels, **professional training, productive resources, economic opportunities and information** continue to be limited for many girls and young women across the globe, particularly those living in rural or precarious settings.

In her conclusive remarks, **Ms. Meskerem Geset Techane** reiterated her concern about the situation of **women's and girls' human rights in Afghanistan**. Measures such as the suspension of girls' secondary education, severe barriers to employment, no opportunities to participate in political and public life, limits on freedom of movement, association, and expression, enforcing a strict form of niqab and strong advice to stay at home, all fit the pattern of absolute gender segregation and are aimed at making women invisible in society. She affirmed that women in Afghanistan continue to demonstrate their determination to participate equally in society at all levels. She finally affirmed that the Council urged States to remove barriers, such as political, legal, practical, structural, cultural, economic and institutional to implement fundamental rights.

#### Interactive Dialogue

**The majority of the countries** highlighted national efforts, action plans, policies, rules and laws, as well as government programmes that protect women and girls against discrimination. These efforts promote women's rights and equality. Condemning violence and discrimination against women and girls' activists, **Barbados, Denmark, Ireland, Israel, Nepal, Romania, Slovenia, and South Africa** affirmed that girls and young women around the world are agents of change. When they take up their activist role, addressing topics ranging from social and economic inequalities to peace-building and conflict resolution, they can bring about transformative change in their local, national and

international communities. The empowerment of girls and young women through the respect, protection and fulfilment of their fundamental human rights is an indispensable precondition for just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies and the achievement of gender equality. Moreover, countries focused their statements on the key and leading role of children and youth in participating in public life sectors. They called on States to remove multi-faceted barriers that prevent them from leading, organizing and expressing themselves, due to structural discrimination, GBV and traditional gender norms that challenge their agency and rights. Among others, **Cuba** agreed that girls and young women have the right to participate actively in family, cultural, economic, political and social life. They also have safe and effective access to education and health, including sexual and reproductive health. **Afghanistan** raised awareness on the critical situations of women and girls in the country, the gravest in the world. Likewise, **U.S.** raised concern about discriminations, attacks and abuses against basic rights of women and girls by the Taliban.

**NGOs**, welcoming the thematic report on discrimination against women and girls, echoed the Working Group in recognizing that girl and young women activists and human rights defenders are entitled to all related legal protections. Despite efforts and creative ways for girls and young women activists to take charge of the growth of society and make the world a more responsible, respectful and accountable place for all humans, they suffer from several hurdles, including the perpetuation of negative social norms and the consideration of activists as a homogenous group. Therefore, they urged States to respect legal obligations to enable women and girls' activism and to remove the structural barriers that inhibit or endanger their participation. In particular, the Federation for Women and Family Planning reported that, despite recommendations made by the Working Group in 2018, women and girls in **Poland** are still facing threats, reprisals and criminalization for their activism, including those for sexual rights. In 2020 Poland introduced a quasi-total ban on abortion, which impacts the lives of women and girls who are forced to look for solutions outside of the legal system. Therefore, the organization called on the State to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health services for all, without discrimination.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (72 country delegations):

*Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Barbados, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chile, China, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Denmark (on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries), Ecuador, Ethiopia, European Union, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lesotho, Libya, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mexico on behalf of A group of Latin American countries (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay), Morocco, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Organization of American States (OAS), Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia (on behalf of GCC group), Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, South Africa, Tanzania, Timor Leste, Thailand, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States, Venezuela.*

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive Dialogue (10):

*Action Canada for Population and Development, Association for women's rights in development, Burundi - Commission Nationale indépendante des droits de l'homme, Center for Reproductive Rights, Inc., The, Defence for Children International, Federation for Women and Family Planning, International Humanist and Ethical Union, International Lesbian and Gay Association, Right Livelihood Award Foundation, Save the Children International.*

**International Organisations** (2): United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Population Fund

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