

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 53rd SESSION

### Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women

30 June 2023

#### Panel 1: Gender-based violence against women and girls in public and political life.

**Mr. Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**, raised concerns about the **major barriers to women’s public and political participation**. To dismantle the patriarchy, the international community needs to dismantle such barriers. In public and political life around the world, many women and girl human rights defenders, women journalists, and women who run for or hold public office and political decision-making positions are attacked viciously and often suffer gender-based violence. Such acts are deliberate, directed at those seen as challenging traditional notions of family and gender, or harmful traditional social norms. Their purpose is to exercise control, perpetuate subordination, and crush the political activism and aspirations of women and girls.

He showed, according to the **UN WOMEN study and data**, 81.8% of women in parliaments have experienced psychological violence, 44.4% have received threats of death, rape, beatings, and kidnapping and 25.5% have experienced physical violence. He affirmed that deep structural discrimination requires profound systemic change. The international community must strengthen national legal frameworks to ensure gender equality, and protect women from violence, both online and off. Prevention is key. Concrete measures, both temporary and permanent, are urgently required. These include quotas for women in public and political life, awareness-raising campaigns to promote their participation, as well as capacity-building to increase their electability.

**Quality access to the fundamental human right of education** is an essential precondition to participate in public affairs. In conclusion, he called upon States to pledge to take concrete and transformative action to tackle gender-based violence against women and girls in public and political life and to promote their participation and leadership.

**Ms. Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences** affirmed that achieving gender equality is not possible without the empowerment of women. Only when women can fully represent their rights, advocate for their needs, participate fully and equally in decision-making, and have the resources to do so, inequalities can be tackled meaningfully. She further affirmed that women and girls continue to be threatened, attacked, shamed, and subjected to gender-based violence for simply articulating their needs, including the right to be free from violence based on their gender or sex. Women leaders and representatives, be they women politicians or those holding public office, continue to be vilified through misogynistic abuse, sexist language, and body shaming while their integrity, intelligence, and values are questioned.

She concluded that the true litmus test for how developed, prosperous, and peaceful a society is, related to how it treats its women and girls. As indicated in the mandate’s report on violence against women in politics, this kind of violence is not only a human rights violation but also goes against the fundamentals of democracy.

**Ms. Nicole Ameline, Member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**, affirmed that the first, most fundamental violence is linked to the de facto exclusion of decision-making systems in which women are historically victims. This is a particularly serious violation of human rights that is no longer acceptable and which from the viewpoint of the CEDAW committee requires a paradigm shift. The first response is to make parity the challenge of our time, a universal standard, the key to the new architecture the world needs. This is the first condition for the implementation of the rights of women who do not have today the capacity to advance their own status by themselves nor to decide on their life, the future of their country, or that of the planet.

She stressed that the CEDAW committee proposes a new **general recommendation N 40** dedicated to the equal and inclusive representation of women in all decision-making systems and affecting the public and economic sphere. The objective is a paradigm shift based on an inclusive and equal vision of governance. She called on all States to support the CEDAW committee and to join the general recommendations, focused resolutely on current generations.

In conclusion, she affirmed that the priority given to the empowerment of girls and women in education is a key element of this new equal culture and we welcome the initiatives aimed at supporting feminist diplomacy and the recognition of women in the international system and the development.

**Ms. Cristina Solano Díaz, Representative of the National Political Assembly of Indigenous Women of Mexico**, reported data from the national studies and statistics. Faced with these data, structural violence, discrimination, and institutional racism are reflected in the attention to the demands of indigenous women and girls in the search for participation in the spaces of public and political life. The active participation of indigenous women and girls is relevant to make visible, act, and demand the enforceability of their human rights, and collective and political rights in all decision-making spaces, from there arises the need for the national articulation of women indigenous as it is.

She concluded with proposals to effectively promote the public and political participation of Indigenous Women and Girls, including guaranteeing the full and effective participation of women in decision-making spaces in all areas of the public and political sphere; granting indigenous women all the physical, economic and material inputs for the performance of their functions in positions of political participation; designing, together with indigenous women, a National Strengthening Program for the Political Participation of Indigenous Women, with cultural and linguistic relevance that encourages their participation and political representation at all levels of government; implement a comprehensive training plan with a gender, intercultural, linguistic and human rights perspective aimed at authorities of internal regulatory systems and political parties at the community, municipal, state and federal level for the prevention, care and punishment of violence policy against indigenous women based on gender; promoting accompaniment programs spiritual, specialized legal defense for indigenous women in the face of political violence based on gender, in the face of institutional violence and sanctioning the usurpation of the candidacies and positions that correspond to indigenous women; and implement an Electoral Observatory for Indigenous Peoples and Communities, whose objective is to comply with laws on indigenous electoral matters and gender-based political violence.

**Ms. Yvonne Apiyo Brändle-Amolo, Member of the Swiss Parliament and President of the European Minority Parliamentarians Caucus**, highlighted the violence faced by women and girls, belonging to ethnic or racial and religious minorities, in political life. She reported that the European Minority Parliamentarians Caucus identified **five major categories of gender-based violence and discrimination**, including intersectional discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices, marginalization and lack of representation, power dynamics and threat to existing hierarchies, and lack of support systems.

She concluded that addressing the barriers faced by women facing multiple forms of discrimination requires a proactive intersectional approach that recognizes the interplay of different marginalized identities. The international community needs to actively dismantle systemic biases, promote inclusive policies, and provide support and resources that empower women from diverse backgrounds to engage in politics and public life free from violence and discrimination.

**Ms. Houda Slim, President of the Arab Women Parliamentarians Network for Equality “Ra’edat”**, focused on the issue of violence against women politicians in Tunisia, Algeria, and Arab countries. Women are under-represented in political life, in particular, because of the multifaceted violence they suffer within families and within the framework of their mandate. There is also a need to change

mindsets within the education system, she added. In addition, traditional media have an important role to play in changing mindsets, she stressed.

The panelists, in their conclusive remarks, affirmed the necessity to create mechanisms to protect women belonging to indigenous populations and of African descent against violence. Political parties must allow women to access political positions. Responsible for violence against women in politics must be held accountable. This type of violence is unacceptable, and society as a whole must be included in tackling this phenomenon. The international community must also recognize the right of women to live in an environment free of violence and punish the perpetrators of violence against women. Collective solutions must be found to address these problems.

### Interactive dialogue

24 countries took the floor during the debate. The majority of the countries informed the Council about their national strategies, policies, and quota. They remained committed to the elimination of women and girls' violations and abuses. Political and private participation has an impact. The participation of women in diplomacy is an indispensable pillar of a well-balanced foreign policy. Most of the country stressed that violence against women active in politics has acquired a new dimension on the Internet and in social networks, where anonymity prevents identification and facilitates impunity for the aggressors.

**Italy** affirmed its commitment to full, equal, and meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity in all spheres of society, including in public and political life. It shared its support for the promotion of women's participation and leadership in crisis management, conflict prevention and resolution, and peacebuilding. **The EU, Belgium, and France** affirmed that women and girls' full, equal, and meaningful participation and leadership in public and political life is essential to advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls as role models for future generations, and to sustainable development and peace. **The UK** affirmed that the prevention of gender-based violence as a key barrier to women and girls in public and political life is also a universal challenge. This remains a priority at home and abroad. **The UAE**, sharing details concerning its National Strategy for the Empowerment and Leadership of Women, remained proactive in working to empower women in all fields and provide the necessary capabilities for this to achieve community leadership and sustainable development advancement. **Sierra Leone** called on states to create enabling environments of inhibited inclusion, devoid of discrimination, harassment, and gender-based violence, that would encourage the full participation of women and girls in development programs and political activities. **Monaco** stressed that in addition to physical or verbal violence of a gendered nature, these violations and violence also take the form of discrimination in access to the highest public and political offices. This can result, on the one hand, from structural obstacles caused by a discriminatory legislative and institutional framework and, on the other hand, from the persistence of sexist stereotypes.

**NGOs** showed data and cases of violations of the human rights of women and girls at both, political and public levels. They also reported several intentional violence committed in Poland, the United States, and Uganda. They expressed their support for general comment No. 40 proposed by the CEDAW, which concerns the equal participation of women in all decision-making systems. **International Lesbian and Gay Association** reported that LGBTI women remain significantly underrepresented in public and political life and decision-making, including in the institutions of all states and in representative positions at the international level.

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

*Spain, Egypt, Canada, EU, Latvia, Pakistan, The Bahamas, Türkiye, Belgium, Australia, Costa Rica, Italy, Bolivia, Luxembourg, Costa Rica, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone, United Arab Emirates, Slovenia, Ecuador, Burkina Faso, France, Venezuela, Monaco.*

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (6):

Danish Institute for Human Rights, Action Canada for Population and Development, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Centre for Reproductive Rights, International Lesbian and Gay Association, Institute for Human Rights.

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

**Panel 2: Social Protection: Women's Participation and Leadership (child-friendly version).**

**Mr. Mahamane Cisse-Gouro, Director of the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,** delivered the opening remarks focusing on interlinkages of women's participation and leadership with their enjoyment of social protection. Social security is a human right embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In times of social and economic instability, social protection shields those that are most affected. However, women and girls tend to have unequal access to social protection, such as pensions, education, working condition, and maternity benefits.

He mentioned that women and girls face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and experience even more barriers to accessing social protection. Migrant women in irregular situations often struggle to access social protection, including coverage of health care, paid leave, and protection against work-related injuries, due to their migration status and their employment in the informal economy. This shows that women face exclusion from social protection and how such exclusion deprives them of autonomy, resources, time, and opportunities for their participation in society.

In conclusion, he affirmed the existence of a lack of women's participation in public and political life in relation to shaping and influencing social protection policies. A gender-responsive social protection can also enhance women and girls' autonomy and participation in economic and public life. Social protection programs targeting women as beneficiaries, when combined with other measures such as awareness-raising, may shift household gender dynamics and can contribute to relieving the financial stress that can be a driver of intimate partner violence.

**Ms. Michele LeVoy, Director of the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants,** reporting national experience, described the difficulties of migrant women in having access to social protection, particularly in relation to health care protection, education, and work-related field. Close cooperation between civil society organizations, health professionals, researchers, human rights institutions, local authorities, health ministries, and UN entities, is key to enacting new laws and policies on health care for undocumented migrants. She mentioned that one of the key barriers for undocumented migrant women in accessing services or justice is the fear that they might be detained and deported.

**Yamikani, a girl activist from Malawi,** addressed the council with national experience of social protection programs. Social protection fits in all these situations because it helps people who live in poverty to meet their needs and address the impacts of poverty. Governments, NGOs, UN agencies, and donors have established social protection programs with the goal to end poverty. However, the coverage of children in these programs is still small. She expressed her concern because the participation of women and girls in social protection decision-making processes is very important. This could contribute to the creation of social protection policies and programs that genuinely address needs, decide the right approaches, and prioritize and target those who are in real need.

In conclusion, she proposed key recommendations including, raising awareness, creating a safe and enabling space for dialogue, consultation, and engagement at community, national, and regional levels; establishing partnerships to provide adequate support for women and girls, and ensuring that policies and programs address gender inequalities and are inclusive, considering the unique needs and perspectives of girls and women.

**Ms. Monica Ferro, Director of the Geneva Office of the United Nations Population Fund**, emphasized the necessity of a global economy that removes all obstacles and empowers women to choose their future and to own their decisions. Social Protection schemes play a pivotal role in doing so. In turn, a gender-equal society and economy will make social protection systems more inclusive and sustainable, ensuring girls incorporation into the labor market and equal opportunities within the world of work by promoting demographic dividend strategies. Women's equal participation requires frameworks that enable them to balance reproduction and production.

She further affirmed that limited social protection and employment policies risk pushing women into informal or unregulated forms of work, characterized by lack of or limited access to social protection. Policymakers have put in place public policies and programs through specific design features in social protection programs targeting education, pensions, and maternity and paternity benefits.

She concluded that social protection systems designed with a gender transformative lens are pivotal to the world we want, a world where we can all leave with dignity and fulfill our right to be outrageously happy.

The panelists, in the conclusive remarks, stressed that women should have access to social protection. These measures need to be intentional and gender transformative. Women faced overlapping forms of discrimination that stemmed from stereotypes of women's roles. The legal frameworks at the national level must be reformed to include provisions for undocumented migrants and enable them to benefit from protection. The right to education should also guarantee to undocumented migrant children. The difference of opinions provided by children was important. Children had the right to participate in decisions affecting them.

### Interactive dialogue

23 countries took the floor during the debate. The majority of the countries, reaffirming commitments to tackle such crucial issues, affirmed that gender stereotypes and harmful and discriminatory social norms continue to impact women and girls' rights across the world. Full, equal, inclusive, and meaningful participation and leadership of all women and girls, including women with disabilities and women in vulnerable situations, in decision-making, is crucial for their full enjoyment of all human rights. Empowering women and girls and closing the gender gap in the world of work is also key to achieving the 2030 Agenda. States shared national plans, initiatives, and activities aiming at eliminating the structural causes of inequalities and discrimination against women and girls, in all their diversity. **New Zealand and the EU** affirmed that social protection is a necessary part of any ambitious and transformative approach to address the root causes and risk factors of gender inequalities, discrimination, and violence against women and girls. **Chile** affirmed that the integration of the gender perspective is crucial in any public policy tool that aims to generate significant impacts on their full economic and social empowerment.

**UN WOMEN** affirmed that the gender gap in paid working hours, already large before the pandemic, has expanded, reversing the fragile progress women had made in the labor market. Progress on poverty eradication has been reversed and gender gaps in food insecurity have widened. Social

protection systems can shelter people from the worst impacts of crises and contribute to a stronger recovery and greater resilience in the face of future shocks.

**Mauritius** considered that to enhance gender equality, the international community should look at three aspects: provide proper health, empower women and girls, and increase the number of women participating in the workforce. **Argentina** stressed that there is no substantive equality without an active State that develops laws and implements public policies that mainstream the gender perspective in all sectors of society. Gender equality requires the promotion of greater participation and leadership of women in all their diversity.

**NGOs** expressed concern about the deteriorating situation of women and girls around the world and little effort taken to address this global phenomenon. They reported situations in different countries across the world.

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

*Viet Nam, Belgium, New Zealand, Kazakhstan, Chile, China, Lithuania, EU, Mauritius, Viet Nam, Qatar, Zimbabwe, India, Cuba, Maldives, Mexico, Argentina, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Botswana, Algeria, Costa Rica, Israel, Iran.*

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (7):

Make Mothers Matter, Jubilee Campaign, International Bar Association, Action Canada for Population and Development, China Ethnic Minorities' Association for External Exchanges, Association.org, AL-Hakim Foundation.

International organization (1): UN WOMEN.

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