

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 54th SESSION

### Annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective throughout the work of the Human Rights Council and of its mechanisms

25 September 2023

In her opening remark, **Ms Nada Al-Nashif United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights** affirmed the equal representation and participation of women in public and political life is a necessary precondition to deliver on the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of equal dignity and rights for all. Some countries have advanced in achieving gender parity in Parliament or within their Cabinet Ministries, yet equal representation across all national decision-making bodies remains an elusive goal.

Women's participation in public life delivers better and more transformative results. Their participation ensures that policies are built on the views, skills, and knowledge of society as a whole, reflecting its needs and experiences. Women's participation is conducive to more durable solutions and a greater likelihood of successful implementation of peace agreements.

In the context of the Human Rights 75 Initiative, the High Commissioner called for decisive actions to tackle gender-based discrimination and stereotypes undermining efforts towards parity. These efforts should also be accompanied by practical measures through education and awareness; more ambitious quotas; and greater visibility to women role models but also through the integration of a gender perspective in the work of international human rights bodies.

**Ms Aua Baldé, Chair of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances**, informed the Council that the Working Group has currently 47,774 outstanding cases of which 4,945 concern women. While women may comprise the minority of the disappeared, they undoubtedly are the majority of those at the forefront of the search for their disappeared relatives, often at great personal risk. It is greatly concerned about the ongoing threats, attacks, and even murder of searching mothers. The gender dimension of enforced disappearances is multi-layered and complex and often not sufficiently recognized. She affirmed that women left behind bear the financial, social, psychological, and legal burden of the disappearance of their relative, oftentimes the family's main breadwinner, experiencing hardship in an environment of stigma, harassment, and exclusion.

When women are made invisible and their expertise unacknowledged; patriarchal stereotypes are reinforced and women's agency goes unnoticed. This is detrimental to the human rights' cause as a whole. The Working Group believes that not one single human rights' issue will advance and thrive without women's equal representation in international decision-making bodies (43 years into its existence, the Working Group is composed of five female members).

**Ms. Alejandra Vicente, Legal Director of REDRESS and member of the GQUAL Campaign Secretariat**, affirmed that the Gqual Campaign was launched in 2015 in response to a particular concern: despite the right to equality being recognized in several human rights treaties as well as in the SDGs, women were underrepresented in virtually all international human rights and justice institutions. She informed the Council on the progress made by the campaign. However, many challenges remain: gender parity in the work of the HRC is not guaranteed. This is because the Council has still not taken key measures that would institutionalize some practices to ensure gender equality.

To conclude, she stressed that as the international community celebrates the progress made so far, gender parity can only be sustained if further action is taken by States, the HRC, and the OHCHR to learn from the recent good practices and to adopt institutional processes that ensure gender equality in the long run.

**Prof. Frans Viljoen, Member of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee**, reported concern about the general picture of women's underrepresentation in UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. Although a majority of thematic special rapporteurships are now held by women, country-specific mandates are still held by a majority of men. He affirmed that there is no doubt that gender has to a very large extent been integrated and made visible as a mainstream concern. However, as the report notes, mainstreaming of gender without meaningful representation of women in leadership positions amounts to treating women only as beneficiaries – and not as agents – of the international law decision-making and development processes.

In conclusion, he reported a few recommendations contained in the report presented. The Advisory Committee encouraged the HRC and the OHCHR to take a more vociferous leadership role on the issue, as well as States to ensure that more female candidates are identified, nominated and in actual fact elected or appointed.

### Interactive dialogue

26 country delegations took the floor during the interactive dialogue. **The majority of the countries** shared national policies and initiatives to meet diverse and equal political representation, with an intersectional and territorial approach in the different public positions and levels. Parity monitoring systems will be strengthened to have disaggregated public information, and the participation of women in all their diversity, and their connection with parties and political decision-making spaces, will be promoted in political training programs. **Egypt** was the first country to launch its national strategy to empower Egyptian women in 2030, in line with the SDGs. **Colombia** reported its Gender and Climate Change Action Plan, where women are leaders of the energy transition and the productive economy associated with the mitigation and adaptation to this phenomenon. **Luxembourg and Norway** affirmed that in order to advance towards gender equality and to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls, the institutions created to protect human rights must reflect this principle in their composition and actions. To ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity at all levels of decision-making, it is crucial to address the root causes underlying the current gender disparity. Gender equality and non-discrimination are two fundamental principles that underpin the realization of human rights, and essential values and priorities of the **EU's** internal and foreign policy.

**NGOs** affirmed that a gendered perspective is the cornerstone of sustainable development. Although representation is important, gender is only one aspect of our identity, and how gender interacts with nationality, race, caste, class, and disability. They highlighted that one's gender does not guarantee a commitment to the advancement of gender equality and the dismantling of interlocking systems of oppression. NGOs also stressed the impact of access to safe abortion on gender equality. Legislation and policy also play a pivotal role in determining access to safe abortion and achieving gender equality. **Plan International** was concerned about the language for girls and young women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as indigenous girls, those identifying as LGBTQI+, girls with disabilities, sexually abused and exploited girls, and victims of trafficking.

**UN WOMEN** while affirming that achieving gender parity is an urgent priority and essential to the United Nations' efficiency, impact, and credibility, shared current projects in this vein.

#### Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (26 country delegations):

*Spain, EU, Indonesia (on behalf of ASEAN and Observer), Jamaica (on behalf of a group of countries), Norway (on behalf of a group of countries), Luxembourg (on behalf of Benelux), Canada, Chile (on behalf of a group of*

*countries), Brazil, France, Switzerland, Costa Rica, Slovenia, Republic of Korea, Egypt, Colombia, China, Georgia, Romania, South Africa, Angola, Peru, Togo, Senegal, Mauritius, Sierra Leone.*

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

Action Canada for Population and Development, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), International Lesbian and Gay Association, Plan International, Sikh Human Rights Group, Akshar Foundation.

International organizations: UN WOMEN, UNPF.

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