

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 56th SESSION

Interactive dialogue with the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

27 June 2024

Ms. Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, Chair of the Working Group, presented the thematic report on Discrimination against Women and Girls. The Working Group brought attention to the mounting resistance to gender equality and therefore necessitated reiterating substantive equality as well as women's and girls' human rights. Gender parity had not been achieved by any nation, despite the progress. She stated that violence against women and girls' activists was on the rise; sexist comments were being made more casually and anti-gender talk was increasing in prevalence; there was a growing global backlash resisting women and girls' right to sexual and reproductive health. The Working group focused on **three main areas: gender justice in post-conflict scenarios, digital lives for gender equality, and gendered aspects of care and support systems**. It proposed meaningful gender equality could only be achieved through states cooperating, private sector supporting these initiatives, and ensuring rights of women and girls. They stated that discrimination should end in family, culture, politics, economy, and sexual reproduction.

The Working Group noted improvements in women and girls' access to education as well as strengthening of institutional, political, and legal frameworks. They were able to see **progress in advancing the issues of women's rights in education and policies to strengthen institutions, politics, and law** when they visited **Mauritania** between 25 September 2023 and 6 October 2023. Regardless, there were still challenges such as poor representation of women in decision-making positions, low female labour force participation rates, extremely low levels of land ownership and home ownership, high rate of maternal mortality, forced marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and school drop-outs due to early marriages. This included **advocating for comprehensive legislation on gender-based violence and intensifying efforts towards actualizing the country's commitment to gender equality**.

The Working Group recognized notable advancements in women's economic engagement and educational attainment, a robust legal framework for women's rights, and **Malta's role as a regional advocate for LGBTQI+ rights** during its visit to the country from June 26 to July 7, 2023. **Deeply ingrained gender stereotypes, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, issues with work-life balance, violence against women, the gender pay gap, laws restricting abortion, and a hostile atmosphere for activists debating sexual and reproductive health rights were among the difficulties noted**. The Working Group suggested promoting women's rights through civil society organizations and opposing damaging traditional gender norms.

The Working Group concluded with an emphasis on how the women's movement had been able to affect the whole world and called for more efforts in advancing the rights of women and girls, preventing any backsliding, and building inclusive, peaceful, sustainable communities for everyone. The range of initiatives and legislative frameworks outlined by Mauritania and Malta across different sectors meant to promote gender equality as well as empowerment of women indicated that these countries were committed to dealing with the issues raised by the Working Group. They strongly stressed the urgent need for action to combat global backlash against women's rights leading towards true gender equality in all walks of life.

Mauritania (concerned country) thanked the Working Group for their suggestions by stating that they had **ratified** a number of international treaties like **The Maputo Protocol and CEDAW**. Among them were projects that offered training sessions for girls who had stopped schooling; activities that generated income specifically for women; mechanisms aimed at protecting women from violence;

increasing political participation among females as well as sensitization campaigns about women's rights.

Malta (concerned country) acknowledged the good progress noted in the report and thanked the Working Group for their visit and report. It indicated an impending National Strategy and Action Plan on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings and included more shelters for victims of domestic abuse.

Interactive dialogue

The interactive dialogue included **41 country delegates** that collectively agreed on the critical need for deeper international collaboration to confront barriers to women's rights. Countries unanimously urged action on critical issues such as gender-based violence, economic empowerment, equal access to education, and increased women's political participation. **Many countries** indicated progress in creating legal and policy frameworks and acknowledged the difficulty of balancing progress with cultural circumstances. The debates also touched on emerging challenges such as gender equality in the digital age and the disproportionate impact of conflicts and disasters on women.

The **EU, Nordic Baltic countries and UN Women** expressed concerns, about the increasing resistance against women's rights, which jeopardizes progress and future advancements. The EU stressed that achieving gender equality remains a challenge for all nations underscoring its nature. They also emphasized the importance of involving men and boys in initiatives promoting gender equality. **Spain and Switzerland** affirmed that women's rights are universal refuting claims that gender equality's a concept to the Western world. **Rwanda and Switzerland** highlighted the significance of incorporating gender approaches in technologies and AI development.

Various countries, such as **Canada and Mexico** highlighted the importance of addressing intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women those with disabilities and from minority communities. **Albania and Algeria** discussed their efforts to enhance frameworks supporting gender equality. **Romania and Malaysia** pointed out the impact of crises on women and girls while **Austria and the Marshall Islands** recognized women's role as catalysts for positive societal change.

Themes like empowerment and violence prevention were prominently discussed by **Ecuador, Togo and Zimbabwe**. **Brazil and Peru** emphasized the necessity of bridging the gap, between policy commitments and practical implementation. **Nigeria** raised worries, about the decline of spaces dedicated to women while **Zimbabwe** called for increased cooperation to combat resistance against women's rights. **Malaysia** has been focusing on implementing gender approaches to providing assistance in Gaza. **Mauritius and South Africa** highlighted the link between gender equality and sustainable progress underscoring the significance of women's rights, in advancing society as a whole.

NGOs expressed satisfaction with the Working Group's report on the rising opposition to gender equality. They emphasized the significance of looking at failures through the lens of oppressive institutions such as colonialism, capitalism, sexism, and others. The use of culture and religion as justifications for discrimination in family laws has drawn criticism. NGOs brought attention to the challenges that women, LGBTQI+ people, and girls confront in public areas. They demanded that gender-based discrimination be acknowledged as a crime against humanity. addressed hate speech and false material that targets women with special emphasis. The declarations stressed the necessity of enacting legislation to promote gender equality, changing family rules, and making sure that the right to practice one's religion isn't exploited as a pretext for discrimination against women and girls. NGOs emphasized the significance of approaches as well.

Delegations that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (41 country delegations):

Albania, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Austria, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, France, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Malawi, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Morocco, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tunisia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

NHRIs and NGOs that took the floor during the Interactive dialogue (11):

National Human Rights Institution, the "Commission nationale indépendante des droits de l'homme (Burundi)," and ten Non-Governmental Organizations: Action Canada for Population and Development, The Center for Reproductive Rights, Inc., Conselho Indigenista Missionário CIMI, Equality Now, Humanists International, International Lesbian and Gay Association, International Planned Parenthood Federation, International Volunteerism Organization for Women, Education and Development - VIDES, Plan International, Inc., Rutgers.

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