Call for submissions  
Gender Justice and the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression

* 1. **What barriers, challenges and threats do women in the public sphere face in exercising their freedom of opinion and expression online and offline?**

In some cultures, men are considered superior to women, in mental and physical abilities, that is because of religious or stereotype reasons. This may be reflected in harassments online and offline when women express their views, especially on public, social, political and religious issues. This may also be reflected in not taking women views into consideration especially in politics and women leaders and by not engaging with women views as people do with men.

More seriously, some women in some cultures may lack confidence in themselves because their male guardians handle almost all their affairs. This start by their father, brother or mother when they are girls and then by their husband when they are married. Women may lack confidence in themselves because they are not allowed to do almost anything because of cultural and/or religious barriers.

Girls should mix more in the society’s activities in early stages of their lives, they also should be taught in school how to deal with certain aspect in the society and how to depend on themselves.

* 1. **What are the distinct challenges faced by those who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination?**

Women, ethnic and religious minorities, migrants and refugees will always face multiple forms of discrimination. Their faith, culture and views may not be understood and in many cases supressed and discredited. Their dreams and aspirations will not be realised and in some cases, they will not be able to reach their goals. Their creative ideas and work will not be absorbed and celebrated by the society.

* 1. **How have the pandemic, economic crises and recent political unrests affected women’s ability to communicate, protest and access information online and offline?**

Lockdowns affected everyone, especially in developing and least developed countries, the lack of vaccines and weak health services made things even worst by enforcing long and strict lockdowns. Many women lost their jobs and livelihood and abandon their goals and returned home as a full-time housewife to care for the family. The lockdown confined women and hindered women to express themselves and limited their ability to continue to strengthen their role in the society.

1. **Can you provide examples or information on ways in which freedom of opinion and expression has been abused or appropriated to undermine women’s human rights?**

This could happen in emerging democracies and countries in political transition where there is less comprehension of democratic process and where culture and old norms still prevail. In some countries or cultures women are prohibited to participate in demonstrations or outdoor activities and forced to stay away because they are not allowed to comingle with men. Also, in some cases women appearance and pictures were restricted in TV interviews, media outlets and social media because of cultural or religious restrictions.

Cultural norms and religious teachings are sometimes being mutated to attack women to confirm their violation of religious teachings and social norms only to degrade women status and activities.

1. **What in your view are the key elements of a gendered perspective on the human right to freedom of opinion and expression? What would a feminist perspective add to the understanding of this right?**

A lot has been done in that regard but yet a lot needs to be done. A feminist perspective can add valuable new dimensions to social and political challenges by inserting women views in relation to their jobs, activism, political views and community involvement. They can add their views on challenges to girls and women in urban and rural areas and uneducated women and girls and raise awareness on women productive health. They can bring more family and children’s issues to the sphere of human rights.

1. **Do you see any legal gaps, inconsistencies or controversies that should be clarified in this report, e.g. between protecting the right to freedom of expression and protecting women from ICT violence? Please indicate any specific issues in the international legal framework that in your view would benefit from further analysis in this report.**

* There is no mention of NGOs role in women empowerment either in women’s participations in these organisations, being a platform for freedom of expression and opinion, an instrument for empowerment and the NGOs role in demanding freedom of expression and opinion and combating discrimination in States. The report should highlight the fundamental and important role of NGOs and encouraging States to do more in establishing free NGOs.
* There is marginal mention of men’s role and effect in the process of empowerment, protection, discrimination and freedom of expression and opinion of women.
  1. **What legislative, administrative, policy, regulatory or other measures exist in your State to promote and protect women’s freedom of opinion and** **expression online and offline? To what extent do these measures take into account intersectionality?**
  2. **In your view how effective are they in supporting women’s empowerment and public participation? Please provide statistical data and judicial decisions, where available.**

1. **What legal administrative, policy or other measures exist in your State to protect women from sexual and gender-based violence and harassment online? How effective are they? What impact have they had on women’s empowerment and public participation, including freedom of expression?**
2. **What do you believe States should do to a) uphold women’s human right to freedom of opinion and expression b) protect women from violence, harassment and intimidation online and offline and c) promote women’s public participation?**

Girls in conservative cultures should be taught to depend on themselves in early stages in schooling and from the beginning as same as boys. In conservative cultures States should start by assigning quotas for women in Government offices and seats in parliaments if there is cultural resistance to these issues. Also, clear laws with solid and efficient mechanism for identifying violations and clear venues of redress. All media outlets must give more time and space for women to appear and express themselves. Social media must do more in taking swift action against anyone who harass and intimidate women.

* 1. **What specific measures have platform providers and intermediaries taken to i) protect women’s freedom of opinion and expression; ii) protect women from online gender-based violence, harassment, intimidation and disinformation; iii) promote women’s equal access to the digital space; iv) address grievances and provide remedies to women users; v) ensure accountability of the intermediaries?**

There are gaps in that regards since these platforms emphasis freedom of opinion and monitoring hate speech and calls for violence but in general terms. There is little emphasis on creating special protection for women, there are few measures in that area, I think.

* 1. **To what extent do you find these measures to be fair, transparent, adequate and effective in protecting women’s human rights and promoting women’s empowerment?**

There have to be more concentrated measures dedicated to women protection especially in the area of discrediting women views and also working on preventing stereotype against women to certain feminist roles by raising awareness.

1. **What do you think internet intermediaries should do to protect women’s right to freedom of opinion and expression and make the online space safe for women?**

All people must be equal on rights and have the liberty to express themselves and opinion, women and men. Intermediaries must be trained on human rights and raise their awareness on women rights, they must also be trained in identifying cases of discrimination, intimidation and harassments against women. There have to be clear guidelines for everyone on the issue. People must read it carefully before participating in the internet. These outlets should also benefit from algorithm in identifying cases of harassment and intimidation against women.

1. **What role has legacy media played in aggravating or addressing the challenges women face in exercising their freedom of expression?  What do you think the legacy media can do to empower women and make the public space safe for them, especially for women journalists?**

Legacy media confined women to stereotype roles of women in movies such as the kitchen, secretary, nurse or a sex symbol. During history, many women pioneers demonstrated demanding rights in voting, jobs dress and productive health but mostly these demands were not taken into consideration by these legacy media.

1. **Please provide examples of good practices by States, internet intermediaries or other stakeholders to enhance women’s right to freedom of opinion and expression and empowerment and public participation of women.**

Social media is a free platform for all to express themselves and free opinion unlike State controlled outlets or legacy media. Some States promoted women in leadership roles in governments organisations, some States gave more rights and quotas in running for public service elections.

Thank you

Ali A. al-khulaifi

Gulf Center for Development

France