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## The Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

### **Online Meeting of the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform)**

8 October 2021

13:30 – 17:45 (CET)

*Owing to the COVID-19 outbreak and the measures adopted to contain it, the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Platform of international and regional mechanisms on violence against women and women's rights took place online.*

#### **Participants**

- Genoveva Tisheva: Chair of the Working Group on Violence against Women of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- Gladys Acosta Vargas: Chair of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- Iris Luarasi: President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of the Council of Europe (GREVIO);
- Marcela Huaita: Vice-President of the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI);
- Margarete May Macaulay: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Rapporteur for Women's Rights (RWR-IACHR);
- Maria Teresa Manuela: Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa (SR RWA);
- Melissa Upreti: Chair of the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls (WGDAW);
- Reem Alsalem: UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (SRVAW);
- ***And staff supporting them:*** Adriana Varela Balter (RWR-IACHR), An Cuypers (SRVAW), Edvalda dos Santos (SR RWA), Federica Donati (SRVAW/WGDAW), Hannah Wu (WGDAW), Jakob Schneider (CEDAW), Johanna Nelles (GREVIO), Luz Patricia Mejía (MESECVI), Marie Saine (SR RWA), Renata Preturlan (SRVAW) and Brighton Musevenzo (SRVAW).

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### **Meeting Summary**

#### **Achievements**

- The platform has improved the capacity to respond and coordinate on important topics in relation to VAW which has been important for visibility purposes,
- It has been possible to react respond and take positions on various topics and issues,
- The EDVAW platform facilitated the ability to speak with one voice through joint statements to emphasize on the importance of collaboration which makes the team stronger,
- A section on the work of the platform was added on the Istanbul Convention website thereby giving it more visibility,
- Members have collectively positioned the EDVAW platform and individual mechanisms within the UN on collaborative efforts. The collective efforts supported other entities,
- It has strengthened cooperation among mechanisms and their individual growth,
- It also has significantly reduced the fragmentation of efforts towards VAW through harmonizing the link between conventions in different regions,
- Thanks to GREVIO, funds have been secured for the platform, received a grant with the government of Japan to attend the session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York in 2023,

#### **Areas identified for improvement**

- ✓ Leveraging each other's work better,
- ✓ How to connect better with civil society organizations (CSOs),
- ✓ Set out new strategic priorities in relation to new challenges such as COVID-19,
- ✓ Consider incorporating other issues that significantly affect women besides VAW,
- ✓ Bring strategic partners on board such as UN Women, UN Agencies and engage with more CSOs,
- ✓ Consider having a work plan on key dates so that the team collectively plan in advance,
- ✓ Make the platform known to Member States and project visibility of the platform e.g. on reports published,
- ✓ Collective strategy to address push backs on the initiative on advancing women's rights with specific interventions,
- ✓ Consider having champions at all regional levels to strategically engage governments. This will also be strategic to be part of the Generation Equality Forum (GEF),
- ✓ Add 'Global' before the 'EDVAW Platform' to make it *Global EDVAW Platform*
- ✓ Mapping the missing links in the areas that are being focused on,
- ✓ Fostering institutional partnerships e.g. Geneva Academy/ School of African Oriental Studies. Put together key materials from published reports so that they can work for advocacy purposes. Proactive dissemination of these materials,

#### **Working Modalities**

*The SR indicated that it is important to see how responsibilities can be shared since members pursue the same objectives and to foster a sense of ownership. This is meant to coordinate the*

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*groundwork that needs constant attention and feedback. The SR expressed that the platform can meet more regularly rather than meet twice a year.*

### **Meeting Proceedings**

**Welcome by SR on VAW:** *Exploring what to do with the Platform, in terms of themes, institutional practices, what went well, lessons learnt and reflections on the work of the platform on the past 4 years and what can be done to improve the platform.*

#### **1. SR on VAW Highlighted Key Focus Areas for tenure**

1. Climate change related disaster risk reduction and response
2. Psychological causes of violence and psychological consequences of violence
3. Violence against indigenous women and girls
4. Violence against stateless women and girls
5. Violence against women and girls with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations

At the same time, she emphasized that she would continue with important initiatives and focuses that her predecessor started, most notably the EDVAW platform and also the focus on femicide.

#### **2. Platform's Key Achievements and Areas for Improvements:**

- *Luz Patricia Mejia (MESECVI):* Highlighted that activities have been conducted both bilaterally and there were coordinated efforts. What is important is that certain things cannot be done alone, as part of the platform everyone can share what is happening regarding VAW and be involved – the collective voice supported and improved each individual mechanism's work.
- *Marcela Huaita (MESECVI):* Also important in view of limited capacity is that the platform becomes stronger as people work together and issues can be harmonised.
- *Federica Donati (SR VAW):* Elaborated that to amplify the work of the platform there are still areas that can be improved especially on contact with UN Women, UNFPA etc., to approach them in a coordinated way. She also encouraged to reflect on how to increase visibility on the Member States and the funding vis-a-vis States. It was indicated that this initiative has been on the side-lines and there is need for action in reviving it.

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- Melissa Upreti (WG DAW)*: Indicated that the platform has been important in knowing the work that other entities are engaging in. She added that there is a need to increase the visibility of the Platform, e.g. the report last year exhibited a good effort.

On civic space, Melissa cited the shrinking civic space and wondered how the platform can connect with civil society. Especially in New York. She expressed that there is an opportunity to do something in that regard. In addition, working methods, coordination and substances should be made priorities – because of the pandemic and emerging opposition against women’s rights. She indicated the need to make it more sustainable in the long term and how the platform can leverage each other’s knowledge and work.
- Johanna (GREVIO)*: Joint statements from the platform have been used to strengthen GREVIO’s standing – i.e. on children and custody. However, not all mandates have the same scope – i.e. GREVIO cannot go beyond VAW, so had to remove itself from certain statements. In the Council of Europe, the Platform is not yet widely known, but a [website](#) exists which explains the role of GREVIO in the EDVAW Platform.
- Marcela Huaita (MESECVI)*: Our priorities: **Access to justice for women, in particular girls and adolescents who have been victims of all types of violence, especially physical and sexual violence.** However, also online violence and other forms of violence. Focusing on two topics now: migrant women, coming from Venezuela, risks of VAW + CEDAW is also working on indigenous women – perhaps this could be a topic. *[Reem (SRVAW) also explained that one criteria for the selection of her priorities is opportunities for leveraging the work/focus by others]*
- Iris Luarasi (GREVIO)*: Finished General Recommendation on digital violence – discussing this topic would be great for the international day of violence against women. CoE focusing 25 November on this, also to launch first GR and to expand the scope of the Istanbul Convention (*so far focused on physical and domestic violence*). Event in Strasbourg on 24 November and social media and perhaps there can be a joint statement on this plus an invite Platform to mini social media campaign. Received the Japanese government grant for physical presence meeting of the Platform, perhaps for CSW in 2022.
- Melissa Upreti (WGDAW)*: On collective strategy and Pushbacks she indicated that the team has a double role: 1) **preventing pushback plus 2) advancing women’s rights agenda (not always on the defensive)** (i.e. resisting rollback but continue to advance – this was the overarching theme decided in 2018 by WGDAW). UNFPA is currently prioritizing online violence (also in terms of

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coordination with UN Women etc.), the platform could engage with another agency on an issue of common interest and follow up can be made on this topic.

- *Reem Alsalem (SRVAW)*: Concerning Online violence the SR VAW indicated that Argentinian Public Prosecution organized an event on online violence and Plan International is also prioritizing online participation. On coordination with other agencies the SR highlighted that most agencies are not yet aware of the work that the platform does. It was her impression that there had been a limited engagement by some UN agencies due to lack of sufficient understanding of the special procedures and she expressed her hope to change that. **One way of increasing their engagement is to invite agencies to specific discussions and be very strategic about who is invited.**
- *Genoveva Tisheva (CEDAW)*: **It would be interesting to see where the missing links for the protection of women are, e.g. weak points of institutional processes, or what does not exist. Important to take into consideration is due diligence**
- *Luz Patricia Mejia (MESECVI)*: In meetings with the SG it was important to mention the strength of the Platform regionally and to highlight the regional conventions and mechanisms. Importance of the platform being an independent mechanism (*in view of the discussion on engaging other UN agencies*). *As for civil society, it would be Important to strengthen this component but in light of priority topics such as femicides. Therefore, the team can come together with all data etc.*

### 3. Member States: Engaging States and Increasing visibility

- *Melissa Upreti (WGDAW)*: The team needs to cultivate a few champions (*with regional representation*). Another entry-point is the Generation Equality Forum, which can be used as a medium. There was lack of interest in inviting women's rights mechanisms but now OHCHR has a role which makes it possible.
- *Johanna Nelles (GREVIO)*: There are a few opportunities: (1) **Committee of the State Parties – ‘government twin body’ which is part of the mechanism.** This is where the GREVIO presidency shares with the CSP, this could be used to include the Platform to increase visibility in the form of the GREVIO President referring to its work during her annual meetings with the Committee. (2) There are champions there – e.g. current presidency is Finland. **Could help**

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**with speaking opportunities at CSW.** The other idea is involving the government of Japan, very interested in CoE standards, and bringing the Platform to New York is an opportunity for Japan to host an event. Another opportunity is the GREVIO activity report, which already highlight GREVIO's interaction with the Platform. GREVIO reports – looking at due diligence but also looking at detailed manners of how the State should have implemented its obligations.

- **Genoveva Tisheva (CEDAW): Another priority is the Istanbul Convention and due diligence.** The platform has to go further, to naming the crimes, not just due diligence standards. Other thing: missing: EU representation, they should be involved. Re. Japan: they are so aware of European standards]
- **Melissa Upreti (WGDAW): Flagging timing – Indicated that there is need to reach out to PMs in November, to be in time for March 2022 CSW.** On Third Committee she added that the team needs to be very clear in terms of what we need. Russia intervention in GA (*that they don't understand the Platform or femicide, etc.*) – **the team should clarify what the Platform is**, that it is not just some personal hobby. **Maybe planning one or two meetings before CSW, even if online, because PMs are so busy during CSW.**
- **Federica Donati (SRVAW): One possibility could be to engage with the new Executive Secretary of UN Women? Also, if useful the team could do the same with UNFPA.** Team to look at the Civil society willingness to engage and possibly attempt a training/awareness with civil society.
- **Arely Varela (IACHR):** going back to priorities for the Platform, **paying attention to pushbacks should be a priority as well as violence against specific groups of women, for example Afro-descendant women.** The Commission has been working on girls' and adolescents' rights (*child marriage for example*) and multiple forms of discriminations.
- **Marcela Huaita (MESECVI):** There should be strong connection with civil society through communications. They also work with the State and the media to support their work. Luz highlighted that two years ago some NGOs were already interested in raising issues before the Platform but there was no structure for that yet. Media has also been important. Re States: within IACHR, to present the platform within different regions

### 4. Working modalities and Platform Governance

- Reem Alsalem (SRVAW) cited an example that on pushbacks WGDAW or GREVIO could lead this, online violence. Clarification: Mechanism that acts as a focal point on an issue would be responsible for preparing the

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groundwork, reaching out to everyone to get their inputs and to leverage everyone's limited resources. She also proposed that the chair position of the EDVAW platform becomes roving (e.g. every year a different chair). **She asked for feedback of everyone by the end of the month on this proposal.**

- *Melissa Upreti (WGDAW)*: **Agreed that in principle it is important to see how to share the burden, as it has been important for all mechanisms.** Assigning certain roles in the common interest of enhancing the visibility of the platform.
- *Luz Patricia Mejia (MESECVI)*: Explained that the original idea was that the leadership/chair position for the EDVAW from global level would make more sense than from regional perspective. The Platform is more of an umbrella structure so makes more sense to lead it from the global level.
- *Johanna Nelles (GREVIO)*: Elaborated that Planning, sharing, division of labour is needed. **Thematically, for example GREVIO leading online violence, could work.** The team might not be able to commit to develop a strategy, but could commit to shaping CSW side events/sessions, for example. [SRVAW explained that the strategy was just an example, that sharing tasks could be a way to highlight that the platform is globally concerned, not just regional concerns]
- *Federica Donati (SRVAW)*: Highlighted that the team could come up with a work plan. She added that no matter which regional mechanism is speaking; it remains a global platform. However, perhaps someone needs to be the coordinator, which SR VAW could keep doing.
- *Reem Alsalem (SR VAW)* committed her office to producing an easy to understand document,
- *Melissa Upreti (WGDAW)*: Highlighted that perhaps an institutional partnership (Geneva Academy etc.), to pull together what exists etc. Not only thinking of creating new work but also to package what has been done to distribute (as so much has not been used or distributed). There also should be a calendar to write specific days or projects that have importance for everyone (opportunities). SR VAW indicated that she has contacted SOAS.

### 5. Side event in New York

- *Melissa Upreti (WGDAW)*: Emphasized that CSW will probably be happy to facilitate engagement with CSOs. **On Side events with States, she added that institutional help is needed, secondly meeting with the SG could be possible, third to engage with CSOs. CPD (UNFPA) is another opportunity**

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- *Reem Alsalem (SR VAW)*: Indicated on the importance of a meeting with the new head of UN Women, with the whole platform after a short overview of what the EDVAW platform is and does has been developed.
- *Luz Patricia Mejia (MESECVI)*: Elaborated that for State representatives, there is the June anniversaries of the Istanbul Convention and Belem do Para Convention, thinking about the calendar and spreading activities over the dates.

### 6. Modalities of the Platform:

- *Reem Alsalem (SR VAW)*: said she is open to rotating chair, to have everyone's ownership. However, the team is happy to continue supporting the SRVAW being the chair.
- Rotating Chair for the platform every year: Platform members to contemplate on suggestions and way forward and then communicate with the SR by the end of October.

### 7. 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2021: Brainstorming of Topics:

- *Federica Donati (SRVAW)*: **On ideas, content, and format** she added that the yearly call on femicide, could continue or not continue, however there are some topics that came out,
- *Renata Preturlan (SRVAW)* **suggested topics related to online violence** (GREVIO, SRVAW has worked on it, other mechanisms have worked on it)
- *Johanna Nelles (GREVIO)* **suggested topics relating to online violence** and indicated that UNFPA is focusing on online violence and the team is trying to prepare a statement between Italy presidency and SG of the organization.
- *Melissa Upreti (WGDAW)*: Global 16 days is in partnership with UNFPA, 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a start of the 16 days. **Suggested topics relating to pushbacks on women's rights. Femicide might still be relevant, this year.**



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- **Reem Alsalem (SRVAW) suggested that perhaps the team can focus on online violence and femicide.** Luz Patricia supported the idea, highlighting that from the Spotlight initiative perspective, online violence and gender-related killings is always important. Spotlight initiative is useful to be mentioned with UN Women.
- **Reem Alsalem (SRVAW): On online violence and femicide, the platform members to share their ideas and a note will be shared on summary of action points. The SR office will also prepare a draft statement to be circulated to all for their inputs.**

### ***8. Pushbacks on Women's Rights***

*The platform should pay particular attention to these areas*

- Sexual Reproductive and Health Rights,
- Adolescent Rights, Child Marriages
- Migration
- Indigenous women
- Push back

### **9. Agreed Action Points**

- Launch of the first general recommendations to deal with all sorts of violence especially online violence on the 16 days on VAW by GREVIO. The event will be mainstreamed through various platforms and the platform members will oversee this process with GREVIO/ MESECVI taking a lead,
- Start reaching out to Permanent Missions in November so that they can get a brief on the platform (*Purpose and priorities*) prior to March 2022,
- Propose a side event for March 2022 that all members of the platform can participate in (All),
- Have a flyer/brief on impacts of the EDVAW platform for networking and visibility purposes (Focal point: SR Reem Alsalem),
- Engage with the new Executive Secretary on UN Women through a meeting even online (Focal point SR Reem Alsalem),
- Develop and maintain a calendar of activities that are important to the platform, (*Covering all Regions*). Calendar was created. Just needs to be updated. (SR'office to circulate an online calendar)

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- Meet with the Head of UN Women and UNFPA ahead of the CSW in NY (SR Reem Alsalem)
- EDVAW Platform members to revert to the SR on her proposal to rotate the chair of the EDVAW platform on a yearly basis by end of October 2021. She will communicate the decision early November. (All)
- For the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2021, circulate a draft statement that links femicide with online violence for consideration of all (SR will circulate a draft for all to feed into)
- EDVAW members to select the priority areas/themes that they would like to lead on filling the table in the annex. Themes that have emerged are already listed. EDVAW platform members are also encouraged to add others (see Annex 1)

#### ***10. Annex 1: EDVAW working priorities and focal points***

<b>Theme/activity</b>	<b>Focal point</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Online violence	GREVIO	
Strategy on dealing with pushback against women rights	WG on discrimination against women and girls	Additionally supported by RWR-IACHR
Femicide	MESECVI	
Afro-descendants/indigenous women	RWR-IACHR	
16 days Campaign		
Summarizing and portraying EDVAW Platform achievements	SR on VAW	
Preparation of side event ahead of March 2022	WG on Discrimination against Women and Girls	
Linking up with UN Women and UNFPA	SR on VAW	