**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)

14 May 2020, 16:30 (Geneva time)

Owing to the COVID-19 outbreak and the measures adopted to contain it, the eighth meeting of the Platform of international and regional mechanisms on violence against women and women’s rights took place online.

*Participants*:

* Dubravka Šimonović, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (UN SRVAW)
* Hilary Gbedemah, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
* Meskerem Geset Techane, Chair of the UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls (UN WGDAW)
* Tatiana Rein, Chair of the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI)
* Marceline Naudi, President of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)
* Lucy Asuagbor, African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights’ Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa (A-SRWHR)
* Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur on the Rights of Women of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IA-RWHR)
* Kalliopi Mingeirou, UN Women's Chief of Ending Violence Against Women Section
* and staff supporting them[[1]](#footnote-1)

It was noted with disappointment that owing to the COVID-19 outbreak and the measures adopted to contain it, the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women did not proceed as planned, but rather a decision was taken to hold the session for one day only in New York on 9 March 2020. Given the circumstances, the SR VAW was unable to participate in person, however her statement was circulated in writing to all delegations.

The SR VAW referred to the press release she issued in late March urging Governments to continue to combat domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and noting that restrictive measures and lockdowns adopted to fight the pandemic intensify the risk of GBVAW, especially domestic violence. In view of the lack of available information on the situation, she issued a call for submissions on COVID-19 and domestic violence – the call requests information from States, NHRIs, civil society and other relevant stakeholders on the availability of shelters or alternatives; the accessibility and availability of protection orders; access to courts and helplines, as well as examples of good practice etc. The SRVAW also referred to a document on GBVAW and COVID 19 on the mandates webpage. The document is being regularly updated, and contains actions being taken in the context of COVID-19 to address GBVAW, by other relevant mechanisms, including the EDVAW platform mechanisms. She suggested discussing what is coming out as a common message from the mechanisms, and if any joint initiatives can be initiated.

The Chair of MESECVI, informed of the recommendations that the mechanism has been issuing to States to address the Covid-19 crisis. She indicated that meetings have been held with Ministers for Women, as well as Gender Focal Points from different State parties. It was noted however that many of them are not being included by individual States in the COVID response agenda. Positive initiatives however are emerging, such as new hotlines or alternatives that don’t involve making phone calls, while some NGOs are playing a significant role in assisting women victims of GBV. Based on this information MESECVI is producing detailed guidelines for States.

The President of GREVIO, referred to a statement the mechanism issued recalling State’s obligations under the Istanbul Convention are still applicable during the pandemic. There is also information available on GREVIO’s website on the measures adopted by States in this regard. The speed with which NGOs have had to adapt to new and alternative working methods should be applauded. It should also be noted that some States have been attempting to adopt alternatives, offering e-protection orders and SMS helplines, and encouraging women to use code words at pharmacies, and other stores, to escape domestic violence during lockdown.

The A-SRWHR Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa referred to a statement issued by the African Commission on COVID-19. The statement specifically focuses on the rights of women, and on the impact the crisis is having on them. It was noted that there are reports of increased sexual violence against girls who are unable to attend school due to the pandemic.

A member of the WGDAW secretariat referred to a comprehensive statement on the impacts of the crisis on women and girls. It was noted that the upcoming report of the WGDAW will address sexual and reproductive health and rights in contexts of crisis, which will also include the COVID-19 context.

A representative of IACHR noted that there is a coordination taskforce for COVID-19, and that the IACHR issued a resolution on COVID-19 and human rights. There was also a specific statement on the impact the crisis is having on women. A number of webinars have been held on the impact on sex workers and on social policies focused on women, while some meetings have been organised with civil society organisations in El Salvador. There are plans to work on a report on women and organized crime in the Northern Triangle.

The Chief of UN Women’s EDVAW section noted an increase in reports of violence against women. However, the data is not always comparable to previous data. In many countries survivors have difficulty finding out whether services are still available. Restrictions in movement, and limited access to technology also hinder women’s ability to seek help. Many women’s organisations have lost funding recently, and their institutional existence is threatened by this crisis. It was noted that women ministers are not being included in designing the responses to the crisis. States are committing (over 100 now) to include VAW in responses to COVID; to retain services and promote awareness raising, especially targeting men and boys and the issue of toxic masculinity. Many guidance documents have been issued but it is necessary to guide States in framing their responses; UN Women has prepared policy briefings in this regard.

The SR VAW noted that all mechanisms, including UN agencies are faced with the same challenges in how to respond to the crisis. She suggested issuing a joint statement by the Platform that would build on what the mechanisms have already issued so far. There is still a lack of data on the increase on VAW and on the different types of violence.

The President of GREVIO noted that administrative data is necessary, but is not sufficient as it is not always accurate. Regarding a possible joint statement, all mechanisms agreed it would be a good idea if the topic falls within their mandates, and it was noted that Gender Ministers should be included in the discussions on the pandemic, and that CSO initiatives to respond to situations of gender-based violence should also be highlighted in the statement.

MESECVI mentioned that in the meetings with States the mechanism has received information on good practices. They are also gathering information from social media, which so far has demonstrated that there are new forms of violence evolving in the wake of the pandemic.

OHCHR staff were requested to prepare a first draft of a statement to be circulated among Platform members for comments. UN Women, OHCHR and other regional organisations could also be invited to join the statement.

It was further noted that the Platform could consider a way of perhaps including CSOs in the dialogue with its members, and this can be discussed at the next meeting.

The SR VAW called for another meeting in a few months time.

***Action Points***

* Issue a **joint statement on the current Covid-19 crisis and its impact on women, citing recommendations to States on how to better address women’s rights and VAW going forward**
* **SR VAW to** **prepare a first draft** to be shared with the mechanisms for comments and input, all are invited to provide suggestions for the text in advance, should they wish to do so

1. Ana Luisa Almeida e Silva Federica Donati, Luz Patricia Mejia, Orlagh McCann, Irene Mbengue, Johanna Nelles, Renata Preturlan and Hannah Wu [↑](#footnote-ref-1)