### Check against delivery

**Statement by DUBRAVKA SIMONOVIC**

**SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

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 *Chairperson,*

*Distinguished delegates,*

It is an honour to address you in my capacity as UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences and to present my thematic report on the **intersection between the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic of gender-based violence against women, with a focus on domestic violence and as a support to the UN Secretary General’s “peace at home” initiative.**

As a result of the pandemic my mandated activities have been affected, and in March I was not able to participate in the Commission on the Status of Women, although my written statement was circulated to delegations; and my planned country visits to Mongolia and Papua New Guinea, have been postponed. In July I presented my thematic report on violence against women journalists[[1]](#footnote-2), and country visit reports to Bulgaria [[2]](#footnote-3) and Ecuador [[3]](#footnote-4) to the Human Rights Council via a pre-recorded statement.

Before presenting my report, let me mention that on 27 May 2020, in conjunction with Equality Now, I organized an online expert group meeting on rape as a grave and systematic human rights violation and gender based violence against women. The EGM report, along with 150 submissions received on the topic, will serve as a basis for my final thematic report to the Human Rights Council in June 2021, which I will supplement with a Model law on rape with the aim of encouraging a process of harmonization of national criminal laws with international standards on rape and sexual violence in both peacetime and during conflict.

**At the beginning of the pandemic, in the midst of media reporting on increases in violence against women, my mandate was o**ne of the first responses to violence against women during the COVID-19 context **and on 27 March 2020** I issued a **press statement calling on States to continue to combat domestic violence against women during the COVID 19 pandemic.**

I am also hosting an online reference document on actions taken and recommendations made by relevant United Nations entities (including UN Women, OHCHR, UNFPA and others), independent expert mechanisms, and civil society organizations in response to the surge in violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic.

O**n 14 May, I convened the eighth meeting of the EDVAW Platform[[4]](#footnote-5) of women’s human rights expert mechanisms online,** f**ollowing** which the **Platform issued a joint statement on 14 July on COVID-19 and the increase in gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls.[[5]](#footnote-6) As you may know institutionalization of this Platform has been my long term initiative and today in** my final address to the General Assembly, I invite you to take the necessary steps and to develop the means to integrate this EDVAW platform into the UN system.

*Ladies and gentlemen, let me now turn to my report:*

 My report was prompted by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of ordinary women everywhere, which have been adversely impacted by the numerous restrictive gender blind lockdown measures imposed by Governments to contain the virus.

The overall message from the report is that: (a) the **COVID-19 pandemic must not be a barrier to eliminating violence against women as a pandemic of women’s human rights violations.** **States should uphold their human rights obligation to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and ensure “ peace at home; (b) States must also take steps to adapt protection measures to the current context, including through the development of e-help lines; e-protection orders, and provide for hotel accommodation as alternatives to shelters where necessary; access to reproductive health services must be guaranteed and considered as essential; (c) full and equal participation of women in decision making must be guaranteed, including in any COVID-19 response plans and ensure the integration of measures to prevent and combat violence against women in such plans.**

Noting the lack of information and data on violence against women in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic’s restrictive measures, on 9 April 2020, I issued a call for information on the availability of essential services for victims including the availability of shelters; access to courts and helplines, good practices etc. and I am sincerely grateful for the 274 submissions received, which informed and inspired this report.

The information received has revealed numerous shortcomings, and the general lack of a coordinated response by States in addressing and preventing gender-based violence against women. While some countries have undertaken the necessary steps to ensure that essential services continue to operate, many others have closed or scaled back such services.

The main findings of my report note that the **intersection between the COVID-19 pandemic and imposed gender-blind restrictive measures, and the pandemic of gender-based violence against women has negatively impacted women’s enjoyment of human rights,** and has exposed and exacerbated pre-existing gaps and shortcomings in the prevention of violence against women, resulting in:

* Increased gender based violence against women, especially domestic violence;
* Limited access to protection measures; limited access to helplines, shelters and safe accommodation;
* Limitations to accessing sexual and reproductive health;
* Revealed a lack of comparable data on violence against women and femicide, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These pre-existing gaps differ from country to country and have been elaborated in my previous 11 country visit reports, and 9 thematic reports, all of which reveal the gaps between international human rights standards and their implementation at the national level, and now additionally intersect with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women.

The pre-existing legal shortcomings in law and in practice in addressing gender based violence against women, including non-recognition of psychological violence as violence against women, the lack of criminalization of marital rape or lack of laws or measures to address sexual violence, incest, forced early marriages, female genital mutilation, as well as other forms of sexual, psychological, physical and economic abuse also increase the risk of such violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

States should ensure that restrictive measures and imposed home confinement **do not have the unintended consequence of enabling and increasing violence against women and domestic violence at home.**

In some States, women were fully included in the design of COVID-19 response plans, including in a leadership role, however, in the vast majority of countries women are largely absent from local, national and global COVID 19 response teams, policy spaces and decision-making.

Recently we commemorated 25 years of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action at a high level gathering during which delegations highlighted the increased level of violence against women during this pandemic, with many raisin the issue of violence against women as national priority concern.

In my statement I have recalled the words of the UN Secretary General that “we must push back the push backs" including the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women’s rights. In order to “push forward” the agenda of gender equality I believe that we must use the momentum to develop a new global system wide strategy to combat violence against women and girls, and to exert more energy and resources on bridging the gap between international and national laws and policy and ensure the harmonization of such laws by placing violence against women high on the UN agenda, as a standing item of the CSW and by focusing on implementation measures and implementation strategies, such as the establishment of femicide prevention watches and other measures outlined in my recent statement on the Beijing +25 commemoration, and in previous reports, including my 2019 report on 25 years of the mandate.

*Thank you*

1. A/HRC/44/52 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. A/HRC/44/52/Add.1 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. A/HRC/44/52/Add.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. EDVAW Platform of independent United Nations and regional expert mechanisms on violence against women and women’s rights: SRVAW, CEDAW, WGDAW, MESECVI, GREVIO, SR WHR Africa CHR, SR WHR, and IACHR <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/SRWomen/Pages/CooperationGlobalRegionalMechanisms.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Available on the mandates webpage. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)