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Platform on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence Against Women

Meeting Report

Addis Ababa, 3 February 2020

The experts agreed on **“Platform of independent human rights mechanisms on elimination of discrimination and violence against women”** and **“EDVAW Platform”** for short. **Mentions to the platform must always include a footnote explaining that references to women include girls.**

Participants: Dubravka Šimonović (chairing), UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; Lucy Asuagbor, Special Rapporteur on the rights of women in Africa; Meskerem Geset Techane, Chair-Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls; Sylvia Mesa Peluffo, Member of the Committee of Experts of the Follow-Up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI); Luz Patricia Mejía Guerrero, Technical Secretary of the MESECVI; Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur on women’s rights of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; Ana Luiza Almeida e Silva, human rights specialist at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; Marceline Naudi, President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of the Council of Europe (GREVIO) (via Skype); Johanna Nelles, Executive Secretary to the Istanbul Convention and Head of the Violence against Women Division in the Council of Europe (via Skype); and OHCHR staff.

The platform meeting preceded the panel on “Addressing the root causes of conflict-related gender based violence and inequality as a means to silencing the guns: experiences from different regions”, organised under the leadership of the UN Special Rapporteur and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights Special Rapporteur on Rights of Women in Africa and in collaboration with the Secretariat of Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for Eastern Africa (EARO). The AU Executive Council with Ministers of Foreign Affairs took place from 6 to 7 February, and the Assembly, with the participation of Heads of State and Government from 9 to 10 February 2020.

Dubravka Šimonović, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, opened the meeting by thanking all of the experts for their presence. This was the second to last meeting of the current project of the Platform; the last one will take place in the margins of the 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in March 2020, New York.

The meeting began by the approval of the agenda (annex 1), after which each mechanism briefly informed on relevant activities carried out since the Platform's last meeting, in May 2019 in Strasbourg.

Ms. Šimonović informed of her report to the General Assembly, presented in 2019, on obstetric violence. It was a new topic, which elicited good responses but also much denial about the existence of the problem. She informed that she carried out country visits to Bulgaria and Ecuador, and that the topic of her upcoming report to the Human Rights Council will be violence against women journalists. Ms. Šimonović mentioned her collaboration with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the decision by the committee to create a working group dedicated to the issue of violence against women.

Meskerem Geset Techane, Chair-Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls, informed that the Working Group in 2019 released a report on the rights of women deprived of liberty, focusing on deprivation of liberty beyond incarceration and the affectations of economic, social and cultural rights, in addition to civil and political rights. Ms. Techane informed that the report was well received by the States. She also mentioned that since 2019 the name of the Working Group was changed by the Human Rights Council to explicitly include girls in its mandate, and that its working methods were also being adjusted to include girls' participation. Ms. Techane mentioned that the Working Group is trying to have one of its three yearly sessions in the regions, to bring it closer to civil society, States and other relevant regional actors. The first regional session of the Working Group took place in Addis Ababa in October 2019.

Sylvia Mesa Peluffo, Member of the Committee of Experts of the Follow-Up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), informed that the MESECVI is concluding its third round of evaluation, with the fourth round scheduled to begin later in 2020. In addition, the mechanism is drafting three thematic reports on the following subjects: (i) violence against women with disabilities; (ii) standards for shelters for battered women; and (iii) child marriage and early unions. The Committee is also working on a general recommendation on violence against women and other gender stereotypes and access to justice. Ms. Mesa informed that a new board was elected for the MESECVI, with Ms. Tatiana Rein as Chair. The Committee is also participating as *amicus curiae* in two cases; one before the CEDAW Committee on trafficking, and another before the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, on the case *Paola Guzmán vs. Ecuador*, a teenage girl who committed suicide after being sexually assaulted by her school's vice-principal.

Johanna Nelles, Executive Secretary to the Istanbul Convention and Head of the Violence against Women Division in the Council of Europe, informed that GREVIO has a new composition after the election of new members. Ms. Marceline Naudi is now chairperson, and is the second president of GREVIO with a mandate of four years. The Group of Experts is now drafting a report on its activities for its four first years. The report will be presented to the Council of Europe in April 2020 and then it will be published. The Group of Experts has also submitted a third party intervention to the European Court of Human Rights, on a case against Austria that could lead to a landmark judgement by the Grand Chamber, in a new role for GREVIO. Besides that, the Group of Experts continues with its regular activities, conducting country visits; there are 13 reports available on countries.

Margarette May Macaulay, Rapporteur on women's rights of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, informed that the IACHR had just published a report on violence and discrimination against women and girls in Latin America and the Caribbean. It was presented in December 2019 to the Permanent Council of the Organisation of American States (OAS). Ms. Macaulay also mentioned IACHR's previous reports on violence against women journalists; on the situation of children in the criminal justice system of the United States. Ms. Macaulay reported on visits carried out in 2019 to Chile, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras and Mexico. She informed that the IACHR and MESECVI had carried out meetings to articulate collaboration. Ms. Macaulay was elected in June 2019 by the OAS General Assembly to an additional four-year term; she remains rapporteur for the same thematic issues (women and afro-descendants). The women's rights rapporteurship has established as priorities: (i) domestic violence and the adequacy of domestic legislation; (ii) trafficking; and (iii) women and organised crime.

Lucy Asuagbor, Special Rapporteur on the rights of women in Africa, informed that she attended the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD + 25) in Kenya, and that the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has issued a General Comment on Article 7 on the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter, on property rights. Ms. Asuagbor also mentioned her participation in the recent launch in Nigeria of a manual on gender dimensions of violent extremism, and gender discrimination in counter terrorism measures developed by UNODC in collaboration with OHCHR.

Next, the experts debated the following agenda item: the preparation of the Publication: "25 years in review of the Beijing Platform for Action: Contribution of the Platform of independent expert mechanisms on violence and discrimination against women towards its implementation". The Platform had decided to prepare this publication, with a short description of the achievements and challenges of each mechanism in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA). Ms. Šimonović presented the consolidated draft, prepared from each mechanisms inputs, and emphasized that the publication's main message is that the expert mechanisms should be included in the BPA+25 process, that will go on throughout the year. The next step will be to produce a shorter version of the publication for online posting, ahead of the CSW session.

Ms. Techane mentioned that the UN Working Group is discussing how to participate in the BPA+25 activities, and asked about any plans for it. Ms. Šimonović reminded that her mandate, the Working Group and CEDAW are already mandated to participate in the General Assembly high-level segment. She is also discussing with UN Women the possibility of participating in the activities of the Generation Equality Forum, scheduled in Mexico (May 2020) and Paris (July 2020); there will be a panel on violence against women in Mexico.

The following agenda item was the preparation of the following day's panel on violence against women in conflict, and the joint statement being prepared on the topic. On this, Ms. Šimonović expressed her wish that the Platform's statement could be made official by the mechanisms that are composed of committees or groups. One possibility would be that each one of them drafted a resolution or any other formal approval. There was also a mention to creating a joint letterhead for platform statements. The relevant mechanisms will discuss these possibilities internally and report to the Platform.

After a round of comments on the draft statement, the experts agreed to continue working on the draft statement by e-mail, for finalization shortly after the meeting. Ms. Techane emphasized the need to explicitly mention girls, and to always mention discrimination before violence, as violence is a consequence of discrimination. She also recommended some mention about the current backlashes on women's rights and attacks against the expert mechanisms mandated to protect and promote them. Ms. Macaulay stressed that there are rulings by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights according to which rape can be considered an act of terrorism. Ms. Šimonović mentioned the adverse effects of statutes of limitation and other legislation incompatible with international standards, even for countries that have developed national action plans under the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In that sense, she highlighted the need for a more comprehensive approach to the issue of violence against women to include violence before, during and after conflict. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was an important achievement, but the elimination of gender-based violence must be integrated in all peacebuilding efforts. It was highlighted that there is a backlash against the concept of gender and noted as positive the inclusion of the term in the title of the consultation "Gender is my Agenda" Campaign Ms. Asuagbor reminded that Art. 10 of the Maputo Protocol establishes the right to peace.

For the agenda item on the UN Secretary-General's strategy on violence against women in politics, Ms. Šimonović informed the experts on her participation in January 2020 in meetings of the UN system Deputies and Executive Committee, in New York, where the Heads of UN entities and the UN Secretary-General discussed elements for a UN strategy on the issue. The Special Rapporteur attended the discussions and provided an overview of her 2018 report on the topic. She highlighted the need for increased coordination between UN entities and independent mechanisms in order to address the issue in a more systematic manner. One of the decisions of the Executive Committee was that UN Women and OHCHR should lead, in collaboration with relevant entities and independent expert mechanisms, a global strategy on how to address the issue of threats and violence against women leaders in the political and public sphere.

Next, the discussion turned to the future of the platform and the follow-up to the letters sent in May 2019 to the heads of organisations, requesting their support for the institutionalisation and funding of the platform. So far, only the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe has sent a formal response. However, since there is a new Secretary-General, the Secretariat of GREVIO will inform the current one about the Platform and the letter. The mechanisms connected to the Organisation of American States and the African Union agreed to do further follow-up with their respective heads.

In March 2020, the first cycle of the Platform will conclude, as the project financed by the Governments of South Korea, Spain and Switzerland reaches its term. The next agenda item was on the future of the platform and the continuation of the collaboration between the mechanisms. Ms. Šimonović stated that the Platform could continue to meet during the CSW sessions, which many of the mechanisms usually attend. She also stressed the importance of securing support from UN Women, OHCHR and other agencies. She suggested that the second yearly meeting of the Platform could be hosted by one of the regional mechanisms. Ms. Šimonović highlighted that the Platform might need to be flexible and conduct meetings with some of the mechanisms, when not all are available; she added that the administrative and

financial costs for the platform meetings would also have to be shared with the other mechanisms for long-term sustainability.

Ms. Macaulay argued that future regional platform meetings should take place in countries that have relevant issues regarding discrimination and violence against women, as a means to shed light on necessary policy measures. She stressed the need to fundraise for it. She also argued that there should be spaces at CSW sessions to promote coordination among the Platform mechanisms and address issues of common interest on a regular basis, which could also bolster contacts with civil society organisations that attend the sessions.

Ms. Šimonović mentioned the need to advocate for more in-depth discussions on violence against women during the CSW sessions, in order to connect it more directly with current challenges. Ms. Asuagbor highlighted that the first step for this is to mobilise States to attend the Platform's side event, which will also increase knowledge of the Platform and the expert mechanisms. It was suggested that the mechanisms should start by reaching out to the States who are already donors and supporters for each of them, and engage them in such substantive dialogue as well. It was reminded that the Platform still lacked some sort of formal recognition; it was suggested that a regional body, such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, could look into doing it through a resolution or some other instrument. Ms. Asuagbor agreed to consult on this.

Finally, the mechanisms shared activities and events being planned for the CSW. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women is organising a High-Level Panel on the platform, with invitations to high ranking UN officials; MESECVI is organising a panel with Panama; the Council of Europe is organising a side event on 9 March, at 16.45, on the digital dimension of violence against women; the Working Group would like to host an event on its 10th anniversary.

The meeting ended with a debate on a name for the Platform. The experts agreed on **“Platform of independent human rights mechanisms on elimination of discrimination and violence against women”** and **“EDVAW Platform”** for short. **Mentions to the platform must always include a footnote explaining that references to women include girls.**

Action points:

- Review and finalise drafting of publication on the mechanisms' contribution to the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action;
- Mechanisms that are committees or groups of experts will verify possibilities of producing formal approvals or resolutions for the Platform's statements and reports;
- Look into the possibility of a common logo for the Platform;
- Finalising the draft statement and publish it;
- Follow up on the advocacy letters to the heads of the Organization of American States, and African Commission; share previous letter with new Secretary-General of the Council of Europe;
- Consult on possibility of resolution by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights that could formally recognise the Platform;

- Preparations for the Platform meeting during the 64th CSW.