

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

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WOMEN, ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

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*Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

It is an honour to present my thematic report on violence against women in politics to the General Assembly in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

Let me begin by briefly outlining some of the activities I have undertaken in the last year.

I recently presented my thematic report to the Human Rights Council, in June 2018, entitled “Online violence against women and girls” (A/HRC/38/47) along with two country visit reports on Australia (A/HRC/38/47/Add.1) and the Bahamas (A/HRC/38/47/Add.2). In November 2018, I will undertake an official country visit to Nepal, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government for its invitation.

In March 2018, during the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women I launched a new institutional platform for thematic collaboration between independent UN and regional mechanisms that are mandated to combat violence and discrimination against women and ensure women’s human rights (including the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the Inter-American Special Rapporteur on violence against women (IA–SRVAW); the UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice (WGDAW); the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa (A –SRVAW); the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI); and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of the Council of Europe (GREVIO)), with a view to strengthening implementation of existing international legal and policy frameworks through the mandates of these mechanism’s.

I have just returned from a meeting between the afore-mentioned mechanisms at the University of Colorado, Boulder, on 2 October 2018, within the context of the 169th period of sessions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). During the meeting, we discussed strategies to eliminate violence against women and achievements and pushbacks on women’s human rights and joint activities related to the prevention of femicide and

implementation of recommendations of this report.

Let me further mention that this report on violence against women in politics reflects information provided by various stakeholders, following a call for submissions, as well as consultations held during an expert group meeting on violence against women in politics, which was held on 8 and 9 March 2018 in New York. The meeting was organized by UN-Women, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) and my mandate, in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), and included the active participation of all relevant UN and regional independent mechanisms on violence against women. This report is complemented by the Expert Group Meeting Report produced by UN Women, which is an example of good practice.

Allow me now to turn to the thematic report I am presenting to you today.

Excellency's, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The scourge of widespread and systematic gender based violence against women is deeply rooted in discrimination against women and continues to shape the lives of female politicians, activists, and voters around the world, often with devastating affect not only on the victims and their families, but also on democracy itself.

The murder in 2016 of Jo Cox, a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, drew public attention as it demonstrated, tragically, that women continue to suffer gender-based oppression when engaging in public and political life. The killing in March 2018 of a prominent Afro-Brazilian human rights defender, Marielle Franco, in Brazil shows how the intersection of gender, race and participation in public life can imperil activist women. Another emblematic case was the assassination in 2016 of Honduran environmental activist Berta Cáceres, one of the many women environmental activists killed each year.

As we look to the future, and in order to address the chilling impact that gender based violence against women has on the political participation and the human rights of women, I believe that urgent action must be taken by States, but also by non-State actors, including political parties, as well as international organizations and independent monitoring mechanisms, civil society

organisations, and women's rights movements (such as the # Metoo movement), to prevent and combat gender-based violence against women in politics and elections, and to support and provide redress to women who are willing to speak up. For those women who have the courage to speak up, they must be listened to and supported and not be re-victimized by a gender blind system that is not yet fully ready for social change.

Distinguished delegates,

The report analyses violence against women in politics, its causes and consequences, and how it affects women's human rights and their participation in political and public life.

Despite the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (art. 7 and 8), that explicitly addresses the right to equal participation by women in political and public life, women continue to be significantly underrepresented at all levels of political decision-making. Indeed, as of 1 January 2017, only 7.2 per cent of heads of State, 5.7 per cent of heads of government and 23.3 per cent of members of parliament are women.

Violence against women in politics contributes to this effect and violates women's human right to live free from gender-based violence in political and public life, and affects the realization of all other human rights, including the ability of elected women to represent their constituents effectively.

The Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, further commits States to ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life (Goal 5, target 5.5) and eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation (target 5.2). In addition, Goal 16 is aimed at ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (target 16.7). The equal participation of women in public affairs is key to reaching that target.

Distinguished delegates

Violence against women in politics is often manifested through misogynistic and sexist verbal attacks, to the most commonplace acts of harassment and sexual harassment, much of it increasingly online, or even femicide. The aim of such violence is to discourage them from being politically active, and to preserve traditional gender roles and stereotypes and maintain structural and gender-based inequalities.

While violence against women in politics may be committed by State and non-State actors, political adversaries are not the only perpetrators, and in many cases, women can be subjected to violence by their peers, family members or friends in an attempt to discourage them from engaging in political life.

Persisting stereotypes associating men with interaction in the public sphere and women with the private, will only seek to further restrict women's access to the political arena, while a culture of silence, stigma and impunity associated with gender-based violence, lead to under-reporting and impunity for perpetrators.

Mr. Chairperson,

There are two dominant conclusions in my report, first, violence against women in politics constitutes a serious violation of women's human rights and is an obstacle to achieving equal political participation and gender equality; and second, there is an urgent and real need to design, adopt and enforce laws and policies that will effectively combat and prevent violence against women, inclusive of political violence, and to guarantee the equal participation of women in political and public life, in compliance with international human rights law that prohibits all forms of gender-based violence against women and protects their right to equal political participation.

My report also provides specific recommendations related to addressing violence against women in parliament and in elections.

Violence against women parliamentarians is a universal and systemic problem. Not only does the perception of power and immunity conferred by parliamentary status encourage a culture of impunity for sexist behavior and violence but there are only a few Parliaments around the

world that dispose of internal mechanisms for combating sexual harassment.

National parliaments must lead the way by addressing the issue of violence against women in politics through the adoption of codes of conduct, and the establishment of reporting mechanisms, while political parties are encouraged to enact in their founding documents zero-tolerance policies for perpetrators of any form of violence against women in politics and elections, including sexual harassment and violence perpetrated through media releases and statements. It is paramount that male parliamentarians are included in efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women in politics and elections.

Similarly, since elections are a key moment in which power is established and voting rights are realized, violence against women in elections remains a major barrier to the realization by women of their right to participate in political and public life and constitutes a specific category of violence against women in politics. The electoral violence faced by women differs from that experienced by men, given the gendered nature of the violations. Very often, the violence is sexual in nature and may also consist of threats to their personal security and that of their loved ones, social ostracism and attacks on their moral character and self-confidence.

In this regard, I believe it necessary for national and international election observation missions to include information in mission reports on the number or percentage of women who vote and are elected, along with quantitative and qualitative data on violence against women in politics and elections throughout electoral processes. Election observers should also be trained. Cooperation must also be expanded with election observation and human rights monitoring communities to conduct analysis of violence against women in elections, such as by sharing data-driven findings on violence against women in elections and encouraging formal submissions to the treaty-monitoring bodies and the universal periodic review process, and using the communications procedures of human rights mechanisms and sharing reports with special procedures mandate holders.

The most immediate impact of violence against women in elections can include fewer women contesting elections and aspiring to political office, fewer elected women, falls in voter turnout and, in some cases, the postponement of elections. Violence at polling stations and against electoral staff may also discourage women from engaging in the vital area of electoral administration. It is therefore essential that both election observation and violence monitoring programmes provide key opportunities for collecting information on violence against women in elections.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Given the key role that independent UN and regional independent monitoring mechanisms on violence against women and women's rights can play in combating and preventing violence against women in politics, I believe that by ensuring that States adhere to international and regional standards, they are encouraged to strengthen their monitoring roles in addressing shortcomings of States in eliminating violence against women in politics and to systematically integrate violence against women in politics into its reporting process. My report also calls for the elimination of violence against women in politics within the context of implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which includes the participation of women in transitional political and peace processes.

All women in politics, whether at the national or international levels, must be empowered to tackle the culture of silence against gender-based violence, to speak up and report such violence to appropriate national and international mechanisms, including this mandate, in order to hold the perpetrators accountable and to advance system-wide changes on the path to achieving equality between women and men in political and public life and eradicating gender-based violence against women.

I would like to invite all of you interested who are in this topic, to join me at an event I am hosting on violence against women in politics, on 8 October (15:00 – 18:00, in Conference Room 6).

Thank you