

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women half-day general discussion on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems**

**Presentation by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences**

22 February 2023

Madame Chair, Excellencies, distinguished guests,

I warmly welcome the CEDAW Committee's move to furnish General Recommendations on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, which are being furnished by the committee in an equally inclusive manner – and therefore leading by example.

Despite being limited, the data we have, still paints a bleak picture with regards to women's full and equal participation.

The fact that as the UN tells us we will need close to 300 years to achieve gender equality sums up that reality and we cannot delink women and girls participation and representation from this reality.

I have been able to corroborate this for myself. In the numerous visits I have carried out as Special Rapporteur, I have come to the very uncomfortable realization that women who claim their place in society, be they politicians, journalists, or human rights defenders, confront the same patterns of misogyny, intimidating and violence with the sole goal of desisting them from rightfully taking their place in society in equality and dignity.

They are subjected to very gendered attacks - usually of a sexualized nature –often online- in part to serve as an example for any other women who dare to walk in their footsteps.

As indicated by my mandate in its thematic report, violence against women in politics in particular is not only a human rights violation but also goes against the fundamentals of democracy and democratic life itself and threatens to offset the positive impact of measures adopted by States in different parts of the world to increase women's representation in political parties, parliaments, and governments.

It also undermines women's ability to participate fully in conflict resolution and peace building processes.

As the concept note of today's half-day general discussion rightfully mentions, all too often, those who are most affected by a policy are usually the least consulted – meaningfully consulted.

The higher the stakes, the less meaningful the consultations become, transforming at times into a “box-ticking exercise”.

How and who you consult, can -in itself- become a continued expression of the patriarchal norms that we are trying to override.

In our quest to ensure inclusive representation of women, I fear though that we may have lost sight of a true intersectional approach.

It is not enough to ensure the equal inclusion of women as a group, but women in all their diversity – especially women from marginalized backgrounds who face high barriers to participation and who often do not have a chance to have their voices heard.

The quest to be inclusive must be the case in every case, even when we may need to communicate through a different language, as is the case with migrant women or indigenous women, when we may have to reflect longer and harder how to consult a woman or a girl who is a survivor of violence in a victim sensitive manner.

I also welcome the nod that the CEDAW Committee will be giving to the efforts that many countries are making to adopt a feminist agenda.

It is my hope that while encouraging States to do so, the Committee's recommendations emphasize the need to "walk the talk", particularly by providing examples of what benchmarks of a feminist foreign policy could look like, as well as insisting that there be coherence between a country's foreign and domestic policies when it comes to women and girls.

In addition to parliamentarians, which CEDAW rightly recognizes as agents of change, I hope that the recommendations will also elaborate on the equally important role and responsibility of the media in stemming the tide of violence against women and girls in politics and public life, by refraining from victim blaming, revictimization, disclosure of sensitive survivor information and fueling harmful gender stereotypes.

I do commend CEDAW for also explicitly recognizing the role of local and regional governments, as it is these regions and localities where the pandemic of violence against women and girls rears its ugly head and where local actors, including governments, find themselves at the frontline of the response, often with limited resources.

In furnishing the recommendations, I would like to encourage the committee to take an expansive approach to the definition of human rights defenders to include those that advocate for, support and enable access of women and girls to sexual and reproductive rights, such as doctors, nurses, and midwives given the push back to this fundamental right.

Finally, and in their examination of measures for achieving gender parity taken by State and non-State actors in representation and participation of women, I would encourage the CEDAW Committee to spell out how to take into consideration the characteristics of sex and sex-based rights in the design and implementation of inclusive measures whether in politics, sports or other areas, with the view of ensuring genuine fairness and non-discrimination for women and girls

I will stop here. From my side, you can count on all my support in this process. Thank you.