## **51st session of the Human Rights Council**

**Annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective throughout the work of the Human Rights Council and that of its mechanisms**

***Theme: Overcoming gender-based barriers to freedom of opinion and expression***

*Concept note (as of 23 September 2022)*

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| **Date and venue:** | **Monday, 26 September 2022, 4 to 6 p.m. (UTC+2) Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva, and online platform (Zoom)** *(will be broadcast live and archived on* [*https://media.un.org/en/webtv*](https://media.un.org/en/webtv)*)* |
| **Objectives:** | The effective exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression is essential for the enjoyment of other human rights and freedoms, and crucial for women’s empowerment and the achievement of substantive gender equality. Despite the many gains for women and girls and people with diverse gender identities in the realization of this right, they continue to face structural, systemic and legal barriers. When they are additionally subjected to intersectional discrimination, these barriers are exacerbated.Gender stereotypes and ensuing discrimination continue to result in the suppression, control, and punishment of the voices of women, girls and people of diverse gender identities, in an attempt to silence and exclude them from the public sphere and to create a chilling effect. This occurs via discriminatory legislation, policies and practices in society, both by State and private actors, including within the family, community, faith-based groups, the media and other non-state actors. It is exacerbated by increasing populist, authoritarian and fundamentalist forces. Women and girls and people of diverse gender identities are censored or otherwise punished for being perceived as challenging traditional notions of family and gender roles in society. Those who are active in the public sphere, such as women human rights defenders, women journalists and media workers, politicians or other women activists, are particularly targeted by threats and acts of violence, including sexual violence, killings and attempted killings. Persisting gender disparities related to digital technologies prevent access to information and threaten the human rights of women, girls and people with diverse gender identities as well. All of these barriers also often overlap and become compounded. **The panel discussion aims:**   * + - * **To foster** a deeper understanding of the gender-based barriers to freedom of opinion and expression and their root causes; * **To explore** how the gendered barriers to freedom of opinion and expression can be dismantled in a comprehensive and sustainable manner, taking into consideration the intersecting forms of discrimination women, girls and people with diverse gender identitites are subjected to; * **To discuss** how the Council and its mechanisms can contribute to give visibility to the gendered dimensions of freedom of opinion and expression including in the analysis of human rights situations, in the formulation of recommendations, in informing policies and programmes and in developing more inclusive prevention and response measures to comprehensively tackle gender-based barriers to freedom of opinion and expression. |
| **Chair:** | **H.E. Mr. Federico Villegas**,President of the Human Rights Council |
| **Opening statement:** | **Ms. Peggy Hicks**, Director of the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| **Panellists:** | * **Ms. Irene Khan**, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression *(video message)* * **Ms. Mariana Duarte**, Programme Officer, Gender Partnership Programme, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) * **Ms. Julie Posetti**,Global Director of Research at the International Center for Journalists * **Ms. Mitzi Jonelle Tan**, Convenor and International Spokesperson, Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines *(video message)* |
| **Outcome:** | The expected outcomes of this discussion are:   * The Human Rights Council, States and relevant stakeholders will have enhanced understanding of gender-based barriers to freedom of opinion and expression and their root causes; * The Human Rights Council, States and relevant stakeholders will learn from shared experiences, new initiatives and successful practices to address the root causes of gendered barriers to freedom of opinion and expression, how the barriers can be dismantled and how to strengthen access to this right for women, girls and people of diverse gender identities. |
| **Mandate:** | In 2007, the Human Rights Council adopted [resolution 6/30](http://ap.ohchr.org/Documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_6_30.pdf) on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system, in which it decided to incorporate into its programme of work an annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective throughout its work and that of its mechanisms, including the evaluation of progress made and challenges experienced. The Council further requested all special procedures and other human rights mechanisms of the Human Rights Council and the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee regularly and systematically to integrate a gender perspective into the implementation of their mandate including when examining the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination against women and to include in their reports information on and qualitative analysis of human rights of women and girls. |
| **Format:** | The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statement and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by a two-part interactive discussion and conclusions from the panellists. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, which will cover the opening statement, panellists’ presentations and their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two segments of interventions from the floor, with each segment consisting of interventions from 12 States and observers, 1 national human rights institution and 2 non-governmental organizations. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Panellists will respond to questions and comments during the remaining time available.  The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish). |
| **Background:** | While many gains have been achieved, particularly thanks to the essential role of women human rights defenders, women journalists and other women activists, we live in a world where gender-based discrimination is persistent, often combined with additional forms of discrimination, and where freedom of opinion and expression for women, girls and people with diverse gender identities remains a distant goal. Previous gains are challenged and the voices and rights of women, girls and people with diverse gender identities are experiencing an unprecedented backlash by authoritarian regimes as well as interpretations of culture, religion and tradition that subordinate and disempower them, seriously violating and imperiling their human rights.In resolution 23/2, the Council recognized that the effective exercise of the rights to freedom of opinion and expression is essential for the enjoyment of other human rights and freedoms. It recognized the important role of women in building democratic societies and of women journalists and women human rights defenders. Resolution 44/12 recognized that the gender digital divide, which includes significant gender disparities in terms of access to and use of information and communications technology (ICT), undermines women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of human rights, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression.In resolution 38/5, the Council expressed deep concern that all forms of discrimination, intimidation, harassment and violence in digital contexts prevent women and girls from fully enjoying their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression.The Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression in her report on gender justice and freedom of expression analyses the challenges that women and people of diverse gender identities face, offline and online, including gendered censorship, threats and acts of violence, including sexual violence, gendered defamation, the weaponizing of public morals to suppress sexual expression and cultural expression, and the restriction of access to information and participation, including as a consequence of the gendered digital divide and unequal access to information. The Special Rapporteur also highlights how restrictions of access to information and participation also occur as a consequence of restrictions of civic space and the attacks against women journalists. She reaffirms the mutually reinforcing nature of gender equality and the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Other special procedures have also highlighted the particular gender-based barriers faced by women in the realization of this right, notably by women in the public sphere. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences has for instance highlighted how women journalists face specific gender-based risks when they conduct their work and identified how the intersection of multiple identities may increase their risks. She also noted how gender-based violence against women journalists has been increasing, including intimidation, threats of rape, threats against family, and sexual harassment. Equally, in her report on violence against women in politics, she identified how this type of violence takes gender-based forms and aims to preserve traditional gender roles and stereotypes and to maintain structural and gender-based inequalities. The Special Rapporteur also addressed the issue of freedom of opinion and expression in her report on online violence against women and girls, noting that despite the benefits and empowering potential of the Internet and ICT, women and girls face online forms and manifestations of violence that are part of the continuum of multiple, recurring and interrelated forms of gender-based violence against women. In their report on discrimination against women in public and political life, the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls also highlighted many challenges to women’s equal, full and effective participation in political and public life in the context of democracy and human rights, including in times of political transition. It stressed that for women to have the capacity to participate in political and public life on equal footing with men, including to build autonomous movements for their own empowerment, they must be able to exercise their rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, movement and association.  The topics covered during the previous Council annual discussions on gender integration can be accessed here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/gender-integration> |
| **Background documents:** | * [Human Rights Council resolution 6/30](http://ap.ohchr.org/Documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_6_30.pdf) of 14 December 2007 on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system * [Human Rights resolution 50/15](https://undocs.org/A/hrc/res/50/15)of 8 July 2022 on freedom of opinion and expression * [Human Rights Council resolution 44/12](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/44/12) of 16 July 2020 on freedom of opinion and expression * [Human Rights Council resolution 38/5](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/38/5) of 5 July 2018 on accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in digital contexts * [Human Rights Council resolution 23/2](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/23/2) of 13 June 2013 on the role of freedom of opinion and expression in women’s empowerment * [General Assembly resolution 75/202](https://undocs.org/A/RES/75/202) of 21 December 2020 on information and communications technologies for sustainable development * Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion on gender justice and freedom of opinion and expression (2021, [A/76/258](http://undocs.org/A/76/258)) * Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on combating violence against women journalists (2020, [A/HRC/44/52](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/52)) * Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders on the situation of women human rights defenders (2019, [A/HRC/40/60](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/60)) * Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective (2018, [A/HRC/38/47](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/38/47)) * Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics (2018, [A/73/301](http://undocs.org/A/73/301)) * Report of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls on discrimination against women in public and political life with a focus on political transition (2013, [A/HRC/23/50](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/23/50)) * Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet: ways to bridge the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective (2017, [A/HRC/35/9](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/35/9)) * Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity (2015, [A/HRC/29/23](http://undocs.org/A/HRC/29/23)) |