***Accelerating the Realization of Gender Equality and***

***the Empowerment of all Women and Girls***

**United Nations Headquarters, New York**

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**Statement by Ms. Dubravka Šimonović,
UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences**

***President of the General Assembly***

***Excellences***

***Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,***

I am honored to be here today, in my capacity as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences at this High-level meeting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and resultant Beijing Declaration and Plan for Action, and to contribute to the discussion on HOW to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, with a focus on the elimination of gender based violence against women and girls.

26 years ago I was in this building participating in negotiations of the Beijing Platform for Action. In 1995, I attended the Fourth World Conference on Women as a delegate of Croatia, and later on actively participated in all of the Beijing+5 follow up processes: as the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2000; as a CEDAW expert between 2002 and 2014; and in my current role as Special Rapporteur since 2015, the human rights mandate entrusted to recommend measures **ways and means at** the national, regional and international levels on eliminating violence against women.

2020 was expected to be **a big year for women**, for reviewing achievements and accelerating progress on gender equality after 25 years of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. However due to the outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic everything has been scaled down, as we meet in this half empty hall, without the presence of numerous women activists whose participation is crucial to push this agenda forward.

Let me mention that the COVID-19 pandemic is also negatively affecting my work with planned country visits currently on hold. During the past 5 years I have had the opportunity to conduct eleven country visits[[1]](#footnote-2) and to elaborate 10 thematic reports[[2]](#footnote-3) all of them revealing a huge gap between the realities of women and girls and the international commitments made by States in the Beijing Platform for Action and other instruments.

On 27 March 2020 I issued a press statement warning that restrictive measures adopted to fight COVID-19 intensify the risk of domestic violence and that home can be a please of fear and abuse, and I called on Sates to continue to apply measures to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to modify them as needed.

I also issued a call for more information on violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic and based on the 274 inputs received I prepared a report for the General Assembly on the intersection between the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic of gender-based violence against women, with a particular focus on domestic violence, while encouraging the “peace at home” initiative of the Secretary General (A/75//44) (available on the mandate’s webpage).[[3]](#footnote-4)

The main findings reveal that the intersection of two pandemics (the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pandemic of violence against women) has increased the risk of gender based violence, especially domestic violence, and access to reproductive health services, and it has exposed and exacerbated pre-existing gaps and shortcomings.

Women’s right to live a life free from violence should not be suspended during this pandemic, nor should it be slowed down by push back movements against women's rights that misinterpret the term “gender” in order to conduct ‘anti-gender campaigns’ including by preventing the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in some countries and halting changes in constitutions and laws that discriminate against women.

I would like to recall the UN Secretary Generals call “to push back against the pushbacks and to continue pushing back” by supporting the acceleratedimplementation of international women’s human rights instruments and agendas like the Beijing Platform for Action.

Gender based violence against women is a structural pandemic of ongoing violations of women's human rights based on unequal power relations between women and men, deeply rooted discrimination against women in law and in practice, and harmful gender stereotypes on the roles of women in society.

It is widespread, and affects one in every three women worldwide, out of 10 intimate partner femicide/homicide killings more that 80% of victims are women, yet, as it is mostly invisible, under reported, and normalized, and so many women and girls continue to be victims of rape and sexual violence, incest, femicide, forced early marriages, female genital mutilation, as well as other forms of sexual, psychological, physical and economic violence all of which are not yet adequately addressed by States in line with their obligations and commitments outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action and other international instruments.

Today, we need to uphold the commitments contained in the Beijing Platform for Action as a universal and comprehensive global framework that should be implemented in conjunction, and in synergy, with other complementary human rights instruments, and platforms including the CEDAW Convention, and its General Recommendation 35 on gender based violence against women; the Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women; the SDG Agenda 2030; the Belem do Para Convention; the Maputo Protocol; and the Istanbul Convention, each of which contribute to the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action.

During the past 25 years progress has been achieved through a better understanding of what legal and other measures are needed for the prevention, protection, and prosecution of gender based violence against women, in a holistic and coordinated manner, as well as thorugh data collection.

We also need to address those forms of gender based violence that were previously not in the spotlight, including new forms of gender based violence, (many of which have been addressed in my thematic reports) such as online violence against women; violence against women in politics and during elections; obstetric violence during birth and reproductive services; rape and sexual violence.

For example, in my next thematic report I will address States’ responsibility to criminalize and prosecute rape. Rape is criminalized in a large number of States in different ways, with different definitions and surrounding norms, often resulting in rape being underreported, and seldom prosecuted; with a very low number of convictions and resulting in impunity for the majority of perpetrators. I intend to elaborate the report with an accompanying Model law on rape with the aim of supporting and encouraging a process of harmonization of national criminal laws with international standards on rape and sexual violence in both peacetime and during conflict.

Today, due to the time constraints I would like to highlight only some of the implementation measures and implementation strategies that I have presented in my past reports, especially in my report on 25-years of the mandate and in my statement before the CSW (A/HRC/41/42), while recalling the importance of them all:

***Under implementation measures***

* Elaboration of a GLOBAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN as a way of accelerating implementation and harmonization of national laws with the Beijing Plaform for Action and other international instruments.
* Inclusion of violence against women as a standing item on the agenda of the Committee on the Status of Women and orientation of the CSW towards implementation ;
* Establishment of a UN system-wide and coordinated approach to prevent and combat violence against women
* Elaboration of a Guide on implementation of the CEDAW General Recommendation 35 and /or elaboration of a new Optional Protocol on violence against women to the CEDAW.

***Under the implementation strategies:***

* **Integration of the EDVAW Platform into the UN system**. The EVDAW Platform prepared an e-publication: “*25 years in review of the Beijing Platform for Action: Contributions of the Platform of independent expert mechanisms on discrimination and violence against women towards its implementation*”
* **Establishment of Femicide Watch/ Observatory on violence against women**
	+ In 2015, I launched the Femicide Watch initiative and called all States to establish a “femicide watch/observatory and to collect comparable data on : (i) intimate partner femicide, or gender related killing of women and girls (ii) family-related femicide or gender related killing of women and girls b**ased on relationship between the victim and the perpetrators** ; and (iii) other femicide and to **determine protection gaps through analysis of femicide cases.**
	+ In its **outcome document on the Beijing Platform for Action +25 review**  **The Economic Commission for Europe** recommended that: “(i) **All countries should establish multidisciplinary national bodies such as “Femicide Watch” with the aim to actively work on prevention of femicide or gender-related killing of women**

**Let me conclude, by recalling that the Beijing Platform for Action urged States: *“to cooperate with and assist the Special Rapporteur on violence against women in the performance of her mandate and to …strengthen it.*”[[4]](#footnote-5) This request remains as relevant today as was 25 years ago, and I would encourage States and other stakeholders to uphold their commitments in this regard.**

**I hope that my recommendations will be integrated in the outcome report of this meeting.**

1. Bulgaria and Ecuador (2019); Canada and Nepal (2018); Australia and Bahamas (2017); Argentina, the State of Palestine/ OPT and Israel (2016); Georgia and South Africa (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Reports on the following topics: mandate’s vision setting report; adequacy of the international framework on violence against women; the modalities for establishing a Femicide Watch; shelters and protection orders; online violence against women: violence against women in politics; analysis of 25 years of the mandate; obstetric violence; violence against women journalists; COVID-19 and gender based violence against women [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/SRWomen/Pages/call_covid19.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)