

Statement by Dubravka Simonovic,
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Consequences

71st session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against
Women

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***Distinguished members of the Committee,
Friends and Colleagues,***

It is a pleasure to be with you here today, and to address the Committee in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

Firstly, let me extend my very warm wishes to those friends and former colleagues, whose terms expire at the end of this year: Ms. Ayse Feride Acar; Ms. Magalys Arocha Dominguez; Ms. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari; Ms. Yoko Hayashi; Ms. Lilian Hofmeister; Ms. Ismat Jahan; and Ms. Patricia Schulz. It was both a pleasure and an honour to serve with you on the Committee, and I commend your relentless efforts to advance the rights of women and girls around the world, and wish you every success and happiness in your future endeavors.

Friends and Colleagues,

Today I will briefly present to you my two thematic reports: the first focuses on violence against women in politics, and the second is on online violence against women. I also wish to update you on progress made in developing the mandates initiative to establish institutional cooperation between relevant UN and regional independent mechanisms that focus on the elimination of violence against women and women's rights. In addition, I would also like to use this opportunity to discuss with you modalities for cooperation between our respective mandates on the implementation of the CEDAW General Recommendation 35, to which my mandate contributed.

Violence against women in politics: 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.

Indeed, despite the provisions outlined in the CEDAW Convention (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. 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.

In this regard, and as a means of exploring this important issue further, I decided to focus my annual report to the UN General Assembly in New York, on violence against women in politics (/A/73/301).

The report reflects broad consultations with, and information provided by, various stakeholders and a range of national, regional and international organizations, following an Expert Group Meeting on violence against women in politics (held on 8 and 9 March 2018 in New York). The meeting was organized by UN-Women, 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 by all relevant UN and regional independent mechanisms on violence against women. Please allow me to once again reiterate my appreciation to your Vice-Chair, Ms. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari, for her invaluable contribution to this report.

Distinguished committee members,

Violence against women in politics constitutes a serious violation of women's human rights and an obstacle to achieving gender equality and full political participation of women in politics and public life. I believe that urgent action must be taken by States and their Parliaments, 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* campaign, to prevent and combat gender-based violence against women in politics and elections.

The report provides recommendations to States and other stakeholders on changes needed to prevent violence against women in politics, and to support those women who have experienced gender-based violence within the political sphere, in public life,

in diplomacy and through electoral processes, including recommendations to the CEDAW Committee based on Ms. Kaddari proposals, to:

Strengthen monitoring roles to address the shortcomings of States in eliminating violence against women in politics. In particular, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women should systematically integrate violence against women in politics into its reporting process and guidelines, which are being revised in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, while the Special Rapporteur and other mandate holders should use their communications procedures and those of the human rights treaty bodies, including that provided for under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to address violence against women in politics (para. 87 (c))

I hope that these recommendations can be discussed by members with the aim of incorporating them into the working methods of the Committee.

Friends and colleagues,

Online violence against women: My report to the Human Rights Council in June 2018, focuses specifically on the issue of online violence against women (A/HRC/38/47), and aims to start the process of understanding how to effectively apply a human rights based approach and human rights instruments to prevent and combat online violence against women as a human rights violation. These emerging types of violence share their root causes with other forms of violence against women and should be considered within the broader context of eliminating of all forms of discrimination against women under the women's human rights framework.

ICT-facilitated forms of violence against women have become increasingly common, particularly with the use, every day and everywhere, of social media platforms and other technical applications (A/HRC/32/42 and Corr.1). In today's digital age, the Internet and ICT are rapidly creating new social digital spaces and transforming how individuals meet, communicate and interact, and by this more generally, reshape society as a whole.

The use of ICTs without the provision of a proper human rights-based protection of women's rights pose a significant risk that could further broaden gender-based discrimination and increase violence against women and girls in society. Women

human rights defenders, women in politics, journalists, bloggers, young women, women belonging to ethnic minorities and indigenous women, LGBT women, women with disabilities and women from marginalized groups are particularly targeted by online and ICT-facilitated violence.

My report calls for the recognition of the principle that women's human rights protected offline should be protected online. In such cases, the CEDAW Convention along with its General Recommendation 35, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and other regional instruments such as the Belém do Pará Convention; the Maputo Protocol and the Istanbul Convention should be applied. There is a need for legislative action at the national level to ensure that all emerging forms of online violence against women such as the non-consensual distribution of intimate content (or "revenge porn") and online sexual harassment, along with online bullying and stalking, should be criminalized and removed from online platforms in cooperation with intermediaries or internet providers.

Friends and colleagues,

I wish to also provide some additional information on an initiative that I launched on the margins of the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2018. As you have been informed by your Chairperson Ms Dalia Leinarte, who participated at different events related to this initiative, it aims to strengthen cooperation between independent global UN and regional mechanisms dealing with violence against women and women's rights¹. The Platform has provided an opportunity for joint meetings and consultation, with our second meeting having recently taken place in October, in Boulder Colorado during the 169th session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

We have also agreed to hold a follow up meeting in May next year, to be hosted by the GREVIO and the Council of Europe from 23 – 24 May 2019 and entitled: *Women's Rights at the Crossroads: Strengthening International Cooperation to Close the Gap between Legal Frameworks and their Implementation*.

Additional information on the initiative can be found on the mandates website.²

² <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/PlatformInternationalRegionalMechanisms.pdf>

In light of our ongoing efforts to systematize cooperation between our respective mandates, I will be happy to discuss joint ways to follow up on the recommendations contained in my previous report on modalities for the establishment of a Femicide watch under which I have recently issued a call to relevant stakeholders for information; on the recommendations contained in this year's report on online violence against women, particularly those related to the criminalization of new forms of online violence, including the non-consensual distribution of intimate images; and on my most recent report on violence against women in politics and during elections; all of which are emerging issues of concern that requires collaborative actions by the international and regional women's rights mechanisms.

Finally, I would also like to take this opportunity to discuss with you modalities for cooperation between our respective mandates on the implementation the CEDAW GR 35, to which my mandate contributed.

I thank you for your time, and wish you a very successful session.

