**44th session of the Human Rights Council**

**Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women**

**Panel 2: COVID-19 and women’s rights**

*Concept note (as of 10 July 2020)*

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| **Date and venue:** | **14 July 2020, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., Assembly Hall, Palais des Nations, Geneva** *(will be broadcast live and archived on* [*http://webtv.un.org*](http://webtv.un.org)*)* |
| **Objectives:** | To discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and compounded gender-based discrimination and at the same time has offered new opportunities to build back more equal societies. |
| **Chair:** | H.E. Mr. Nasir Ahmad Andisha, Vice-President of the Human Rights Council |
| **Opening statements:** | **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  **H.E. Ms. Arancha González Laya**, Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain (*video message*) |
| **Panellists and themes:** | * **Ms. Editar Adhiambo Ochieng**,Founder of the Feminist for Peace Rights and JusticeCentre and feminist activist from Kibera informal settlement, Kenya (*video message*)   ***Testimonies from the ground:*** *Women and girls’ life during the COVID-19 pandemic in informal settlements*   * **Dr. Natalia Kanem**,Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (*video message*)   ***Ensuring health and freedom from violence****: Women and girls’ freedom from gender-based violence and their enjoyment of the right to health in the COVID-19 pandemic*   * **Ms. Jayati Ghosh**, Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India (*video message*)   ***Protecting women’s livelihood****: Strategic opportunities to advance women’s economic participation and their resilience against future economic crises*   * **Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**, Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) (*video message*) and **Ms. Åsa Regnér**,Deputy Executive Director of UN-Women *(concluding remarks)*   ***Participation in political and public life****: Women and girls’ equal participation and leadership in response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic* |
| **Outcome:** | A summary report on the discussion will be prepared by OHCHR. |
| **Mandate:** | In its resolution 6/30, the Human Rights Council reaffirmed the principle of gender equality and the need for the full implementation of the human rights of women and decided to hold an annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women. The second panel of the 2020 annual discussion will address the impact of COVID-19 on women’s rights. |
| **Format:** | The total duration of the annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women will be four hours, divided into two panels of two hours each. At this panel, the opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two slots. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statements, panellists’ presentations, their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two slots of interventions from the floor for States and observers (2x12), national human rights institutions (2x1) and non-governmental organizations (2x2).  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 will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. 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. |
| **Background:** | The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and compounded gender inequalities. At the same time, it has offered new opportunities for gender equality and women’s rights. Quarantines, school closures and other movement restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19 have contributed to the sharp increase in the rates of gender-based violence, in particular domestic and intimate partner violence, due to the combination of various factors, including increased levels of tension in unavoidable closer coexistence, economic stress and the disruption of social and protective networks. Girls face heightened risks for the exposure to harmful practices, including child marriage, due to the disruption of support systems for children. Overloaded health systems, reallocation of resources, shortages of medical supplies and disruptions of global supply chains have undermined the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls, including their access to maternal care, contraception and treatments for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.  Women are at the frontline of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, women comprise 70 per cent of health workers, including midwives, nurses, pharmacists and community health workers. Women are also playing key role in essential services, such as in the food production and supply chain, cleaning and laundry, and care work. And yet, many of them are working in low-wage and precarious conditions. In many countries women are concentrated in irregular employments and in the informal sector that are highly prone to disruption and with no or limited access to social protection. In formal economy, women are also over-represented in hospitality (hotels, restaurants), manufacturing, retail and leisure and recreation industries that have been among the hardest hit by the response to COVID-19. Pre-existing gender inequality, such as gender pay gap and gross imbalances in the gender distribution of unpaid care and domestic work, is likely to lead women giving up participating in labour market during the pandemic and beyond. School closures, combined with increased domestic and care work and economic constraint, have been negatively affecting girls’ continuation of education in many countries and it will likely to undermine their access to employment and gainful livelihood in future.  Despite the critical needs for voices, expertise and experience of women and girls in the responses to and recovery from the pandemic, women and girls – and women’s networks and rights organizations – are not equally represented in local, national and global policy spaces. Feminist movements and women human rights defenders are under threat. Emergency and other security measures to restrict movement and gathering have had an impact on civic space for women, including of women human rights defenders, which was already restricted before the crisis. Funding for their activities that was already severely limited is further diverted away. In most countries, emergency task forces to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic have a limited representation of women.  However, responses to the pandemic have also created opportunities to transform the society in positive ways. The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the real value of care work. It has demonstrated the real risk of overlooking gender inequality and discriminatory gender norms. It demanded change of our lifestyles, including more flexible ways of work and re-thinking of distribution of work at home. The responses to it highlighted the value of women’s leadership and acute need for solidarity and cooperation. Some promising practices for “building back better” have been emerging. The panel discussion is an opportunity for States, United Nations entities, civil society and other stakeholders to reflect on how to build back better the society from the impact of COVID-19, while protecting and promoting gender equality and women’s rights. |
| **Background documents:** | * [Human Rights Council resolution 6/30](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/RES/6/30) of 14 December 2007 on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system * [UN Secretary-General’s policy briefs](https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/un-secretary-general): * [Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_report_socio-economic_impact_of_covid19.pdf), 31 March 2020 * [The impact of COVID-19 on women](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_apr_2020_updated.pdf), 9 April 2020 * [COVID-19 and Human Rights](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_human_rights_and_covid_23_april_2020.pdf), 23 April 2020 * Statements by United Nations human rights mechanisms * [Guidance note on CEDAW and COVID-19](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/Statements/CEDAW_Guidance_note_COVID-19.docx), CEDAW Committee * Joint statement of special procedures mandate holders: “[Every worker is essential and must be protected from COVID-19, no matter what](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25892&LangID=EEvery%20worker%20is%20essential%20and%20must%20be%20protected%20from%20COVID-19,%20no%20matter%20what)”, 18 May 2020 * Statement of the IE SOGI: “[States must include LGBT community in COVID-19 response](https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25889&LangID=E)”, 17 May 2020 * Joint statement of special procedures mandate holders: “[Responses to the COVID-19 could exacerbate pre-existing and deeply entrenched discrimination against women and girls](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25809&LangID=E)”, 20 April 2020 * [OHCHR guidance](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/COVID-19.aspx): * [OHCHR Guidance on COVID-19 and women’s human rights](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/COVID-19_and_Womens_Human_Rights.pdf), 2020 * [OHCHR Guidance: COVID-19 and the human rights of LGBTI people](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/LGBT/LGBTIpeople.pdf), 2020 |