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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Interactive dialogue on “Eliminating violence against women in public life”

Chair’s summary

1. On 17 March 2021, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue on the theme “Eliminating violence against women in public life”, focusing on how violence against women affects their participation in public life and decision-making, on the types of interventions that are needed to eliminate such violence and on how to better track and document it, as well as on the importance of effective prevention measures.

2. The Vice-Chair of the Commission, Shilpa Pullela (Australia), made an introductory statement, which was followed by an interactive dialogue moderated by Martin Chungong, Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The following guest speakers made opening remarks: the Chair of the Coalition of Women Members of Parliament from Arab Countries to Combat Violence against Women and former member of the House of Representatives of Jordan, Wafa Bani Mustafa; the Public Defender of Georgia, Nino Lomjaria; the Senior Associate and Director for Gender, Women and Democracy of the National Democratic Institute, Sandra Pepera; a researcher from the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research at the University of Buenos Aires, Laura Albaine; the Chief Executive Officer and co-founder of the Youth Against Slavery Movement and the Anti-Slavery Collective for Generation Equality, Racha Haffar; and the Deputy Executive Director for Normative Support of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Åsa Regnér. Twelve representatives of Member States contributed to the dialogue, and representatives from five non-governmental organizations also provided their views. The dialogue concluded with concluding remarks by the moderator, followed by closing comments by the Vice-Chair.



Enactment and enforcement of evidence-based legislation and policies aimed at addressing violence against women in public life

3. Participants recognized that violence against women in public life is becoming more pervasive around the world, as more women gain access to political positions and assume a more prominent role in public life. Participants also acknowledged that violence against women in politics is a significant barrier to their equal, effective and meaningful participation and to the achievement of objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and constitutes a threat to the integrity and quality of democracy.

4. Speakers highlighted the need to enact and enforce specific laws and policies that criminalize violence against women in public life, including sexual harassment. They shared examples and best practices designed to complement national legislation and enhance accountability, such as adopting political party by-laws, parliamentary codes of conduct and other gender-responsive institutional policies that denounce and punish violence against women politicians. Other best practices identified included establishing national caucuses of women parliamentarians in order to address violence perpetrated by police, and providing legal services for women politicians in parliament.

5. In addition, speakers called upon States to urgently take measures to respond to the needs of women who have experienced violence in public life, including by ensuring that women victims and survivors have access to high-quality support services such as psychosocial counselling and legal advice, strengthening gender-based violence case management systems and investing in training for law enforcement officials in the investigation of cases of gender-based violence. Speakers also noted the importance of strengthening research and policy agendas, collecting data on the nature and incidence of violence against women in public life and allocating sufficient resources to implement national action plans aimed at addressing gender-based violence in private and public spaces, including in workplaces and online platforms.

Greater long-term investment in the prevention of violence against women and girls

6. Participants noted that attempts are made to ridicule, isolate and/or silence women in the political and public arenas when traditional power dynamics are challenged, as the increased number and participation of women in politics tends to shift political priorities towards upholding social rights and children's rights, and towards greater investment in health care and education, all of which require increased resource allocation. These threats, many of which are of a personal and sexual nature, are rooted in patriarchal attitudes and beliefs about women's role in society.

7. Speakers pointed out that violence against women in politics is being perpetuated through "gendered disinformation" and has increasingly become a political tactic designed to exclude women's voices. Efforts to manipulate underlying societal prejudices against women can have a negative impact on voting in elections, resulting in less progressive political outcomes. Speakers noted the need to raise awareness of these types of manipulation tactics and to speak out about violence against women in public life, including harassment, in order to address this violence and prevent it from recurring.

8. Speakers recommended that measures to prevent violence against women and girls should be long-term in nature and address the root causes of violence against women in public life, such as gender inequality and discrimination against women. It

is important to include adolescent girls, especially in relation to the issues that most affect them, such as child marriage.

9. Speakers stressed the need for women in politics to network, mentor each other and share experiences, exchange best practices and provide support and solidarity, especially to younger women, who often leave the political arena at an early age owing to the harassment and other forms of violence they have experienced.

Robust measures to address the increasing use of online violence against women in public life

10. Participants raised concerns about the rise of online violence, in particular in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Speakers noted that online violence should not be considered a less severe form of violence, particularly as its far-reaching impact on psychosocial health has been well documented. They called for stronger measures to hold perpetrators of online violence and violence facilitated by information and communications technologies accountable, including through stronger penalties and by putting an end to impunity. They recommended that large technology companies ensure that their platforms are free from violence and abuse.

11. Participants noted that online platforms have also helped to ensure swifter reporting and more opportunities to monitor trends of violence against women in politics. They identified several promising practices, including the establishment of institutional mechanisms and observatories aimed at monitoring violence against women in public life, in an attempt to better understand the scope of the problem so as to facilitate the design of more robust protection and prevention measures.
