



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Sixty-fifth session**

15–26 March 2021

**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”**

### **Statement submitted by Equality Now, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Equality Now, an international human rights organization with ECOSOC status and partners and members in almost every country, calls on all member states at the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women to review and amend their sex discriminatory laws and put in place clear constitutional, or other, guarantees of equality and the rule of law, as a matter of urgency.

The law is a statement of your worth as a citizen and reflects the values of your government and society. A country's ecosystem of laws and justice systems set the tone for how it treats its people, and how its people treat each other. All laws should live up to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and other international human rights instruments.

The law can be a powerful tool to end violence and discrimination against women and girls, including when combating harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, as well as sexual violence and exploitation. The law can comprehensively define the obligations that governments have to protect women and girls from violence and discrimination in the first place, and provide for services and no impunity when their rights are violated.

Legal equality still has not been achieved in all but 8 countries as shown by the Women, Business and the Law project of the World Bank. Some progress has been made in that 155 economies have domestic violence legislation in place. Laws that require women and girls to "obey" their husbands and/or male guardians, however, could give men the right to "chastise" their wives and even child brides, subject them to marital rape, prevent them from leaving the home, working, choosing where to live, and treat them less equally than other family members.

Governments must protect women's and girls' rights in all spaces and relationships, public or private, married or not to tackle their unequal status, including in family law, which can further violence, exploitation and economic disadvantage and prevent women and girls from participating fully in society and reaching their full potential. States must also enact and enforce protective and preventive measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including on-line sexual exploitation and abuse. When a woman or girl is assaulted, exploited, or subject to harmful practices she deserves a criminal justice system that is survivor friendly, accessible, and that holds perpetrators accountable, which may also act as a deterrent.

While governments chart a way forward from COVID-19, they must not only recognize the gendered impact of the pandemic, but also that existing legal systems contributed. If there had been better laws, policies and protections in place, then the ongoing effect on women and girls would have been less catastrophic. In rebuilding, all member states should take this opportunity, with the active participation of all members of society, to uphold, promote and achieve the essential principle of substantive legal equality on the basis of sex for all by: finally repealing or amending all laws, including family laws, that discriminate; adopting and enforcing constitutional provisions which guarantee equality without exception; and, implementing progressive legal frameworks.