

-Check against Delivery-

62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

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

12 March 2018, GA Hall, New York

Chairperson,
Excellences
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to address you today in my capacity as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and to contribute to the discussions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on the Priority theme on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls and the Review theme on Participation and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies. As combating violence against women and girls is a cross-cutting theme, I am glad to address you today and to report on my mandate's work since last year and to inform you about my upcoming initiatives to combat this pandemic worldwide.

Progress in eradicating gender-based violence against women and girls is visible but slow and inconsistent due to insufficient State response and deeply entrenched stereotypes that make us all tolerate and normalize it. Over the course of the country visits I conducted I have witnessed tolerance and normalization of violence against women as a way of life. Almost all country visits reports conducted by the mandate since 1994 until today reflect this grave concern.

It seems that, nowadays, we are facing a major global change of attitudes and a shift from tolerance and normalization of sexual harassment to its open public rejection and in some cases the removal of perpetrators from their positions because of the unanimous social condemnation of their acts. It all started with the transformative #Metoo movement originated in Hollywood that spread out to other parts of the world.

It is my firm conviction that these powerful few words #Metoo should guide the discussions of this year's session of the Commission. Our challenge now is to find ways and means to support this and similar movements, with a view to achieving a change that will put an end to tolerance of the violence against women.

In this respect, I would like to inform you that on the occasion of the International Women's Day, the UN mandates on women's rights, namely the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and my mandate, issued a joint statement in support of the # Metoo movement calling it "a transformative, liberating and empowering" movement and offered, in line with our respective mandates, support for the continuation of this and similar actions worldwide.

I would also like to draw your attention to another important movement “Ni Una menos” or “No one more” against femicide or gender related killings of women, which started in Argentina but spread worldwide. These groundbreaking and transformative movements must be supported in all parts of the world. For this purpose, my mandate called for the collection of comparable data on femicide and the establishment of femicide watch or femicide observatories worldwide. I also recommended the creation of a femicide rate as an indicator of violence against women in different States.¹

However, let me also highlight the emergence of raising pushback movements, such as the one on an alleged “gender ideology”. This movement is spreading across some Latin American and some European countries, amongst others. This and other conservative movements aim at promoting a misinterpretation of the term “gender”, labelling it as a “gender ideology” that would be disruptive for family. They also oppose any moves to ratify important international and regional women’s rights instruments, such as the Istanbul Convention, or the adoption of national laws which protect and promote gender equality.

I firmly believe that we all need to come together and raise our voices in order to promote a constructive, positive and truthful interpretation of the term “gender” as commonly used by the UN and the Beijing Platform of Action and the SDG Agenda, which promotes efforts towards “achieving gender equality” as the universally accepted Goal No 5.

To oppose this backlash of regressive movements curtailing women’s rights, we need to widely promote the new CEDAW General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19. I would like to highlight that my mandate closely collaborated with the CEDAW on its drafting process and participated in its adoption and launch.

Also, the term gender has been defined in the Beijing Platform of Action, CEDAW General recommendation No. 25, as well as in General recommendations No. 19 and No. 35 where violence against women is defined as gender-based violence against women (GBVAW) prohibited in international law and as a principle of customary international law.

By clearly defining “violence against women” as a “gender-based violence against women” – as both the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Istanbul Convention do – CEDAW General recommendation No. 35 represents a strong instrument against all these regressive movements as it clearly states that violence against women constitutes “gender-based violence, that is, violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”.

CEDAW General recommendation No. 35 discusses in detail actions needed to prevent, protect and prosecute gender-based violence against women and girls and provides a roadmap for States to upgrade their National Action Plans on violence against women and intensify efforts in the prevention, prosecution and protection of victims.

Another recent significant normative achievement was the adoption, in May 2017, by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, of new Guidelines for Combating Sexual Violence and its Consequences. My mandate was invited to its launch last year in Banjul. The Guidelines offer a commendable set of specific and implementable tools to eradicate sexual violence and also call for the

¹ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/398&Submit=Search&Lang=E

implementation of national action plans.

At the OAS level, the MESECVI lately adopted a Model Law against violence against women in politics, on which my mandate was also invited to provide comments.

Let me finally inform you that we just convened an Expert group meeting on violence against women in politics, co-organized by UN Women and the OHCHR, with the participation of NDI, IPU and all UN and regional independent mechanisms on violence against women in preparation of my mandate's GA report on this topic. We need to support all movements that are standing against sexual harassment and VAW in politics.

Chairperson,

Given the widespread climate of tolerance towards sexual violence, I applaud the UN Secretary-General's vow of commitment to ensure that maximum attention is given to this issue and action is taken across the United Nations system to achieve parity and also to tackle sexual harassment and to protect victims through the establishment of the new Victims' Rights Advocate. I stand ready to assist in the development of the necessary guidance in this field, as this is truly unacceptable.

Chairperson,

At this opening plenary CSW session, I would like to highlight the progresses achieved in relation to my mandate's initiative aimed at developing institutional thematic cooperation between UN and regional independent mechanisms dealing with violence against women and women's rights. During the last CSW session we started the process by holding a meeting with the UN Secretary General who immediately supported the initiative.

I am very glad that we have present here today representatives of all these UN and regional monitoring mechanisms, namely: the Chair of the CEDAW Committee, the President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of the Council of Europe (GREVIO), the President of the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), the Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the President and Rapporteur on the Rights of Women of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and members of the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and Practice.

During the session, all mentioned mechanisms will hold consultations in order to discuss and possibly develop a work plan and design thematic issues in the context of our cooperation. We all share the same goal: prevention and elimination of gender-based violence against women. Our platform is focused on thematic cooperation and on the joint use of UN and regional instruments against gender based violence against women (such as the CEDAW, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Beijing Platform of Action, BdP, the Maputo Protocol and the Istanbul Convention), with a focus on their more effective implementation.

On Tuesday, we will also hold a High Level Panel on "Institutional Cooperation between Global and Regional Independent Mechanisms dealing with Violence and Discrimination against Women" at 11:30 am - 12:45 am in the Ex-Press Bar, with the participation of the Deputy Secretary General and the Director of UN Women; and later a Side event on "Fighting violence against women in politics" co-organised with the Permanent Missions of Switzerland, Croatia and Belgium and the participation of the Permanent Mission of Korea at 1:15 pm - 2:30 pm in Conference Room D.

In this respect, I would like to thank Switzerland, the Republic of Korea and Spain, that have supported this initiative, and to call on other States to support it and to turn it into an even more sustainable one.

In particular, I hope that this initiative on institutional cooperation of UN and regional mechanisms on violence against women will be sustained and supported by the regular budget of the UN, and all regional organizations, but also by other initiatives such as the EU UNSpotlight.

My hope is that in the future this CSW would have a forum showcasing all relevant work of the UN and regional independent mechanisms on violence against women and women's human rights as a part of its regular segment.

I will briefly mention the UN Trust Fund on violence against women and call for the establishment of cooperation with my mandate as envisaged in the Trust Fund 1994 founding resolution. I would like to call on Trust Fund donor States and CSW members and observer States to join my call for such a cooperation.

Chairperson,

The equal and safe participation in and access of women to the media and information and communications technologies is extremely promising in order to accelerate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in public and private spaces, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5. Yet, this has also generated online violence as a continuum of offline violence against women and also as new forms of violence against women.

It is clear that forms of blackmail, threats of sexual assault, unauthorized distribution of intimate images or information (so called revenge porn), surveillance, cyber trolling and stalking, among others, cause serious harm both online or offline, resulting in women and girls' withdrawing from using the Internet while producing serious impediment for women's right to live a life free from violence.

My mandate intends to address this important issue in my upcoming thematic report which will be presented to the Human Rights Council in June. A particular focus will be placed on upholding the right to life free from online violence against women, in particular for young girls at risk of new forms of online violence threats, as well as on preventive measures, education and awareness raising programs and the responsibility of States and intermediaries to combat online violence against women and girls.

Last year, I presented two thematic reports to the Human Rights Council and to the General Assembly.

In my Human Rights Council's report, I covered the issue of a human rights-based approach to integrated services and protection measures on violence against women, with a focus on shelters and protection orders.² In this report, I highlighted that many States tend to perceive the establishment of shelters or support for NGOs running shelters as voluntary commitments and not as part of their human rights obligations. Also, I called for the establishment of a global UN database on shelters and I hope that, given the alarming lack of shelters worldwide, especially in rural areas, my call will be reflected in the CSW Agreed Conclusions on the priority theme.

² http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/35/30

In my GA report on the adequacy of the international framework, I also called for the development of a global implementation plan on violence against women and for the organization of a Fifth World implementation conference on violence against women. I would like to once again reiterate this call.

It is now in your hands. You have the power to make it happen, you have the power to turn the #metoo and all similar movements into a positive reality for all women and girls.