**Submission – Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences**

**1.0 Introduction**

1.1 The State of Mauritius is regarded as a peaceful country. According to the Global Peace Index 2020 (2020 GPI) issued by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), Mauritius is ranked 23rd in the Global State of Peace and 1st in Sub-Saharan Africa. Based on statistics, the rate of femicide in the State of Mauritius is relatively low, with 29 cases of femicide reported from 2018 to 2020 and out of which 4 cases were reported during the COVID-19 period. Disaggregated data on same is provided below at paragraph 2.1 and 2.2.

1.2 However, despite the low rate of femicide in Mauritius, cases of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) have been on an increase, especially during the curfew period related to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to data published by Statistics Mauritius and which can be accessed on [Covid\_doc\_domestic\_violence.pdf (govmu.org)](https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Documents/Homepage/Covid19/Covid_doc_domestic_violence.pdf#search=domestic%20violence), 520 cases of domestic violence were reported during the period of 20 March to 30 May 2020, out of which 481 cases were perpetrated against women.

**2.0 Statistics on femicide**

2.1 For the period 2018 to 2020 (as at November), **ninety two (92)** cases of homicide/femicide or gender related killings of women/men have been reported to Police. A breakdown of these cases is as follows:

**Administrative Data (by numbers and percentage) on Homicide / femicide or gender related killings of women for the last three years (2018-2020)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year  | Total Number of Homicides of women / men (% included) | Total Number homicide / femicide of women / men killed by intimate partners | Total Number Homicide/ femicide of women /men killed by a family member | Other gender related Killings of women by unrelated perpetrator |
| 2018 | Women: 12 (33.33%) | 7 | 2 | 3 |
| Men: 24 (66.66%) | Nil | 4 | 20 |
| **Total: 36** | **7** | **6** | **23** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 2019 | Women: 8 (28.57%) | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| Men: 20 (71.42%) | 1 | 4 | 15 |
| **Total: 28** | **6** | **6** | **16** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 2020 (Jan-Nov) | Women: 9 (32.14%) | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| Men: 19 (67.85%) | 1 | 2 | 16 |
| **Total: 28** | **6** | **3** | **19** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Grand Total** | **92** | **19** | **15** | **58** |

2.2 As far as femicide during the COVID-19 pandemic is concerned, for the period March to October 2020, **four (4)** cases of femicide have been reported to Police as compared to the same period in year 2019 where **seven (7)** cases have been reported. Disaggregated data pertaining thereto is illustrated in the table below:

**Comparative Data of femicide for 2019 and 2020 (March to October - Covid-19 pandemic Period)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year  | Total Number of Homicides of women | Total Number homicide / femicide of women killed by intimate partners | Total Number Homicide/ femicide of women killed by a family member | Other related Killings of women by unrelated perpetrator |
| 2019 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 1 |
| 2019 (Mar-Oct) | 7 (87.50 %) | 4 | 2 | 1 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| 2020 (Jan-Nov) | 9 | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| 2020 (Mar-Oct) | 4 (44.44 %) | 2 | 1 | 1 |

**3.0 Observatory on violence against women with a femicide watch role**

3.1 Gender Based Violence (GBV) is considered as a serious crime in Mauritius. Hence, the fight against same has always been a priority in the agenda of the Government of Mauritius. To that end, funds have been earmarked by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, to run the Observatory on GBV in Mauritius. The setting up of this Observatory is seen as a much-needed progression to strengthen the data capture on gender-based violence in Mauritius.

3.2 Moreover, the setting up of such an Observatory will lead to harmonised data collection for informed policy making and monitoring and evaluation of initiatives on GBV. This platform will enable the setting up of a holistic and transparent mechanism to strengthen collaboration and understanding of the actions carried out in matters related to care for victims; evolution of gender-based violence in Mauritius and subsequently elaboration of future public policies to eradicate this serious social problem which constitutes the worst example of the inequality suffered by women.

3.3 Furthermore, the National Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2024 of the High-Level Committee on the Elimination of Gender Based Violence was launched on 25 November 2020 on the occasion of the International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women. Same is mainly geared towards the elimination of GBV wherein a strategic and a multi-sectoral approach has been adopted therein.

3.4 The National Strategy Document and its accompanying Action Plan present the new strategic direction of the Government of Mauritius to eliminate Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Mauritius. It reflects stakeholder engagement and has been drafted in a participatory manner to capture the current specificities of the Republic of Mauritius.

3.5 It is further informed by international best practices and frameworks to address the root cause of gender inequality and is survivor-focused. The key elements of the National Strategy revolve around having a shared understanding of the nature and extent of Gender Based Violence in Mauritius, the commitment of multiple stakeholders, the need to strengthen existing legislative and policy framework, capacity building of stakeholders; and a strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

3.6 In order to ensure the successful implementation of the National Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan, Government has set up the following Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms:

1. a High Level Committee under the chair of the Hon. Prime Minister to monitor and evaluate the progress made on the implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan on a half yearly basis;
2. a National Steering Committee on GBV chaired by the Hon Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare meet on a quarterly basis. The first meeting was held in January 2021.
3. four Technical Working Groups to ensure the implementation of the activities falling under each of the following sub strategies:
4. Change societal norms and beliefs that are against principles of gender equality and equity;
5. Priority support services for survivors while holding perpetrators accountable;
6. Identify and redress discriminatory practices that perpetuate gender-based violence; and
7. Coordinated Monitoring and Evaluation.

Each Technical Working Group meet on a monthly basis and report to the National Steering Committee.

3.7 The commitment of all stakeholders, including Government, civil society, development partners and the private sector and adequate financing will be crucial to ensure that Gender Based Violence remains as a priority issue on the national agenda.

3.8 To this end, the key recommendations supporting the National Strategy that are responsive to the present country context are as follows:

1. the adoption of a systems-thinking approach in responding to matters of Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence to ensure implementation of the National Strategy through a collaborative effort and shared understanding of Gender Based Violence;
2. a stronger commitment of all stakeholders to data collection, analysis, monitoring and evaluation and;
3. a paradigm shift towards capacity building of the Lead Agency to provide strategic direction to all stakeholders to effectively implement the National Strategy and Action Plan.

3.9 The Action Plan of the Technical Working Group on Monitoring and Evaluation in relation to the Observatory on GBV and femicide can be found at **Annex A.**

**4.0** **Research and studies undertaken to analyze femicide or gender related killings of women and girls, or homicides of women by intimate partners or family members and other femicides**

4.1 The State of Mauritius has set up a Parliamentary Gender Caucus (PGC) in March 2017. The PGC provides a platform for members of the National Assembly from all political parties to discuss on issues and policies relating to women in the society and to come up with concrete solutions. It helps the promotion of women’s descriptive and substantive representation.

4.2 The Caucus also serves to ensure that gender equality issues are mainstreamed into legislative and policy processes and within parliamentary processes, as well as to facilitate dialogue within and across parties. It has commissioned a study on “The Sociological Profiling of Perpetrators of Domestic Violence in Mauritius” which can be assessed on the following website: <https://mauritiusassembly.govmu.org/Documents/Publications/GenderCaucus/GC01.pdf>

**5.0 Measures taken to improve support to victims of violence and to prevent femicide**

5.1 The Government of Mauritius has an active participation in providing support to victims of violence. To that end, the Family Welfare and Protection Unit (FWPU) was set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare to implement policies and programmes in favour of families and to address the problem of Gender-Based Violence.

5.2 The Protection from Domestic Violence Act (PDVA) was enacted to protect spouses from domestic violence. Apart from sanctions against perpetrators of domestic violence, the Act also provides for issues such as:

1. **Protection Order** which restrains the abuser from further acts of violence and ordering him to be of good conduct. The Order can last for a period not exceeding 2 years.
2. **Occupation Order** which grants exclusive rights to the victim to live in the residence which may belong to the victim, the abuser or both
3. **Tenancy Order** which gives the victim exclusive right to occupy a rented house and the spouse who rented the house would continue to pay the rent.

5.3 Subsequent amendments were brought to the PDVA so as to provide for protection to all family members living under the same roof, harsher penalties for non-compliance of orders and for the rehabilitation of perpetrators through counselling amongst others.

5.4 Moreover, the Government of Mauritius envisages to bring forthcoming amendments to the Protection from Domestic Violence Act. One of the major amendments to the Act will be to make it mandatory for perpetrators to follow rehabilitation programmes as this can have a significant impact on reduction of GBV. Consultations with various stakeholders are ongoing, including Rodrigues.

5.5 The FWPU adopts well-defined strategies to address Gender Based Violence, and these include:

1. Intervention
2. Prevention
3. Rehabilitation
4. Harmonisation and Data Collection.

5.6 The FWPU offers its services to victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence through an institutional mechanism known as the Family Support Bureaux (FSBx). Currently, there are six FSBx scattered around the island, namely at Goodlands, Flacq, Phoenix, Bambous, Souillac and Port Louis. A list of the services offered free of charge by the FSBx is as follows:

1. **First-Hand Counselling**, whereby Family Counselling Officers and Family Welfare and Protection Officers provide victims and perpetrators of domestic violence with counselling with a view to build a rapport with the victims and perpetrators that may ultimately help the latter to voice out their problems;
2. **Legal Advice/ Assistance at Court**, whereby Legal Resource Persons provide victims of domestic violence with services such as legal advice and legal representations at Court;
3. **Psychological Counselling** provided to victims and perpetrators in strict confidentiality by Psychologists posted at the level of FSBx. Advice is also given to support women victims of domestic violence and their children;
4. **Assistance to victims of domestic violence** with regards to their application for a Protection Order, Occupation Order and Tenancy Order under the Protection from Domestic Violence Act;
5. **Provision of psycho-social support** as a follow-up following provision of Court Orders under the Protection from Domestic Violence Act;
6. **Referral to other institutions** as appropriate;
7. **Provision of Shelter**, whereby victims of domestic violence and their children are provided with round the clock secured housing on a temporary basis pending court orders; and
8. **Counselling services to perpetrator**, whereby psychological Counselling is provided to perpetrators to bring a change in their mind-set and help in reducing violence. According to the Protection from Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act 2007, District Magistrate can also refer perpetrators of domestic violence for Psychological Counselling upon consent of both parties to the FSBx, amongst others.

5.7 Moreover, hotlines have also been made available to victims to facilitate early intervention. The hotline **139** is operational since November 2016 on a 24/7 basis and is free of charge for reporting of domestic violence cases. The hotline **119** on the other hand, is operational to cater for reporting of family related problems to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare.

5.8 Another measure adopted by the Government of Mauritius is the implementation of the Mobile App Project for victims of Gender Based Violence. In the Context of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women 2020, the National Strategy and Action Plan on the Elimination of Gender -Based Violence (as mentioned above in Question 1) and the Mobile App for Victims of Gender- Based Violence was launched by the Prime Minister`s Office in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare and the UNDP on 25 November 2020.

5.9 In the Mobile App “LESPWAR”, a panic button enables a victim of Gender Based Violence to rapidly connect with the Police Main Command and Control Centre. The application can be downloaded on a smart phone and clear instructions are provided for registration and use of the panic button. Since the launching ceremony in November 2020, personnel of PFPU are being placed on 1st and 2nd shift duty daily to respond to the alert signal.

5.10 As part of preventive measures, the Government of Mauritius has introduced Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaigns that are conducted to sensitise the public at large on issues pertaining to gender-based violence and the welfare of the family. The Government has ramped up its effort to address the issue of gender-based violence through the following projects and programmes:

1. **Men as Caring Partners (MACP)** which address the problem of domestic violence and promote greater involvement of men in family responsibilities with a view to:
2. Enhance the understanding and importance of gender equality to men;
3. Ensure the effective participation and involvement of men in family wellbeing;
4. Promote equal opportunities to men and women in the development process; and
5. Ensure that men become caring partners through the implementation of Male Responsibility and Family Well-Being
6. **Pre-marital Counselling Programme** which is an opportunity for engaged couples and future married couples to learn about each other and oneself in depth while paving the way for an enduring, harmonious, successful satisfying and happy marriage.
7. **Marriage Enrichment Programme** which helps couples to strengthen their relationship and be better prepared to face the challenges of married life and develop the ability to resolve conflict.
8. **Inter-Generation Relationship Programme (IGR**) which helps the three generations on the importance of inter-generation relationships. It aims at strengthening ties within the family and promote family values among the three generations that is youth/parents and grandparents.
9. **Strengthening Values for Family Life Programme (SVFL)** which aims at building positive parenting and family bonding through the inculcation of good values for family life. It also serves as an essential requisite for married and engaged couples to lead a successful married life.

5.11 The Government of Mauritius has also implemented the following measures with the aim of facilitating rehabilitation:

1. the **Domestic Violence Perpetrator’s Rehabilitation Programme**, launched in 2018, with a view to:
2. bring a change in mind-set that would help perpetrators to abstain from committing acts of violence;
3. enable them to manage anger which often lead to domestic violence;
4. empower them to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner; and
5. educate them to become responsible partners in their relationship.
6. the **Economic Empowerment Programme of Survivors of Domestic Violence**, launched by the FWPU in 2016, where victims of gender-based violence are empowered so that they can join an institution for gainful employment, greater financial stability and independence. The Empowerment Programme also helps to build self-esteem and self-confidence of the survivors.
7. the **Victim Empowerment and Abuser Rehabilitation Policy (VEARP)** which was set up as a workplace initiative in both private and public sectors to address the problem of gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence. The purpose is to enhance the knowledge of both employees and employers on the existing legislations, services and to urge them to be compassionate on the situation of domestic violence so that basic assistance could be provided to victims whenever required.

5.12 The State of Mauritius through the Police Family Protection Unit (PFPU) has also implemented the following measures:

1. a sensitisation campaign known as *‘the Outreach Programme’* which has started since 03 October 2020 in Police Divisions on a weekly basis throughout the island including Rodrigues to encourage the early reporting of domestic violence cases. Details pertaining thereto are as follows:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sn** | **Date** | **Division** | **Venue** |
| 1 | 3 Oct 2020 | Eastern (Launching) | Bhagwant Moka District Council Quartier Militaire  |
| 2 | 10 Oct 2020 | Southern  | Sookdeo Bissoondoyal SSS  |
| 3 | 17 Oct 2020 | Central  | Municipality of Vacoas/Phoenix  |
| 4 | 24 Oct 2020 | Metropolitan South | Municipal Hall, La Tour Koenig  |
| 5 | 07 Nov 2020 | Metropolitan North | Kaylasson Hall, Abercrombie  |
| 6 | 28 Nov 2020 | Western  | Town Hall Municipality of Quatre Bornes  |
| 7 | 05 Dec 2020 | Rodrigues | Malbar Parking |
| 8 | 19 Dec 2020 | Northern  | Goodlands Farmers Centre  |

1. Innovative measures have been included in the Outreach Programme such as Slams, Sketches and Poems in Creole. New sets of pamphlets in English and French have been designed. Moreover, Route March is being led by the Police Band, Special Mobile Force (SMF), Special Support Unit (SSU), regular police, personnel of PFPU and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).
2. Sensitisations for pre-married couples in different parts of the island have been carried out where some three hundred and eighteen (318) persons were in attendance. Details pertaining thereto are hereunder:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **DATE** | **NAME OF COMMUNITY CENTRE** | **TOTAL** |
| 28-Oct 2018 | La Cure De St MarIe Madeleine, Pointe Aux Sables | 76 persons |
| 27-Oct 2019 | St Marie Madelaine Parish Pte aux Sables  | 76 persons |
| 15-Mar 2020 | St Sauveur Church Bambous  | 86 persons |
| 27-Sept 2020 | Sainte Marie Madeleine Point aux Sables  | 80 persons |
| **TOTAL** | **318** persons |

**6.0 Good practices and challenges**

6.1 As part of the good practices, the Government of Mauritius organizes several sensitisation campaigns on a regular basis across the island. In a bid to raise awareness on the issue of femicide and gender-based violence, the National Women’s Council organises ongoing sessions on topics such as Domestic Violence against women’s rights.

6.2 In 2018 and 2019, the National Women’s Council implemented the *‘Shefighter Programme’*, a self defence training programme, to empower women and young girls to take a stand and defend themselves against violence.

6.3 With a view to facilitate harmonization and data collection, the **Domestic Violence Information System (DOVIS),** which is a computerized system for the registration of reported cases of domestic violence was implemented and is used as a tool to monitor, assess, record and generate specific reports on such cases dealt at the Family Support Bureaux under the aegis of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare.

6.4 In line with the objective of Government to place citizen at the centre of public service delivery, the Citizen Support Unit (CSU) of the Prime Minister’s Office has been set up on 28 April 2017 to manage an internet-based complaints management platform, the Citizen Support Portal (CSP). This pioneering platform, which is accessible round-the-clock on the web address [www.csu.mu](http://www.csu.mu), has been developed and put in place to facilitate the registration of complaints/general inquiries and suggestion online. The CSU has recently taken further steps to ensuring that the vulnerable groups of the society are given the due attention they deserve and that their voice is heard. In this context, the CSU has embarked on an initiative to address in a holistic manner the scourge of domestic violence where women are too often victims of a male dominated society.

6.5 However, the biggest challenges that the State of Mauritius encounter is that many cases of gender-based violence including of domestic violence are not reported.

6.6 Also, in many cases, the victims have a tendency to return to live with their perpetrators, for such reasons that they are not financially independent, they do not have a place to live or for fear of separation from their children.

6.7 Furthermore, following acts of violence, most perpetrators regret their abusive behaviours and ask for forgiveness. The victim often feels relieved and aspires for hopeful change in their future relationship. This stage often prevents the victim from initiating legal proceedings against perpetrator and also report acts of violence to the authorities.

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