



Sixty-eighth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Statement by Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Opening Speech

Monday, 11 March 2024

Your Excellencies, Ambassador Antonio Manuel Revilla Lagdameo, Chair of the CSW,

And Ms. Sima Bahous, UN Executive Director,

Distinguished representatives and participants,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Commission.

Women's rights are human rights – however I am sure I am not the only one to feel that we stand at important crossroads when it comes to this fact in law, which is also an aspiration we strive to uphold.

Any advances that may have been made – be they in women's political or economic participation – are threatened by the frightening setbacks we have witnessed in the last few years.

Nothing exemplifies this setback more clearly than the utter disregard for the safety, dignity, and humanity of women that we have seen in recent conflicts and the contempt that warring parties have shown towards the international human rights and humanitarian law that protects civilians, including women.

The moment of reckoning has arrived:

The international community has failed so far to usher in a ceasefire in Gaza, for what is essentially a war on women and children, or stop sexual violence against women in Sudan, the terrorization of women in Haiti, or the marginalization of women from public life in Afghanistan – to mention a few

What will it take for Member States, including those that center gender equality in their foreign and domestic policy, to show that the lives of women indeed matter?

Another example is the frightening scale at which information and technology-facilitated platforms and tools are being co-opted to facilitate sexual exploitation, violence, and abuse of women and children, particularly those who are marginalized, as well as our inability to keep up with their constant evolution and harmful use.

These global developments give a particular urgency to reconsidering the proposals that were made by my mandate over the years, to include violence against women and girls as a standing item on the agenda of the CSW and to develop a dedicated global plan.

Such action would also be in line with the UN Secretary-General's call for an emergency plan on violence against women.

By strengthening the ties that the CSW has with international and regional human rights mechanisms - like mine which turned 30 this year- it would also ensure that all issues before it, such as this year's priority themes on poverty and gender-responsive institution and financing, are anchored in human rights principles and that implementation is measured against the obligations of States.

Speaking of State obligations, has the time come to resurrect plans for an optional protocol to the CEDAW specifically dedicated to ending violence against women? Most of my predecessors and I believe so.

Unfortunately, I am very concerned about the impact of the financial crisis of the UN, which will also severely hamper the ability of special procedures, including my mandate to do its work.

As for the issues before the CSW, let me say that during my visits to different countries, I have seen the devastating impact of curtailed programs and services that were initially designed for some of the most vulnerable groups in society, including women from racial and minoritized groups - as part of the austerity measures.

Similarly, funding to frontline, grassroots and women's rights organizations that offer specialized support and outreach to those most in need is being frequently sacrificed, which is both short-sighted and detrimental for the groups concerned.

We must commit to procuring funds for women, including for those who are most at risk of falling through the cracks of social protection schemes and other measures; if we want to truly empower them and lift them out of poverty.

Equally, we must ensure that women's rights organizations participate in the decisions made on public funds and tax policies.

Finally, Governments must improve gender outcomes of taxation, through removing overt biases and reforming tax systems that currently result in implicit gender bias.

They must design and implement tax policies that promote gender equality. Where they have not done so, States must conduct gender-sensitive analyses to assess and correct for pre-existing biases.

I look forward to discussing these priorities with all of you over the next two weeks and beyond.

Thank you.