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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development****Situation of women human rights defenders****Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights
defenders***Summary*

In the present report, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, reviews the situation of women human rights defenders, covering the period since the issuance, in 2011, of the last report by the mandate holder on this topic (A/HRC/16/44 and Corr.1). He focuses in particular on the additional gendered risks and obstacles women human rights defenders face and recognizes their important role in the promotion and protection of human rights. The Special Rapporteur refers to the relevant normative framework for the work of women human rights defenders, describes the challenging environments in which they operate and analyses the impact of patriarchy and heteronormativity, gender ideology, fundamentalisms, militarization, globalization and neoliberal policies on the rights of such defenders. He also refers to the situation of specific groups of women human rights defenders.

The report contains recommendations and examples of good practices to support the building of diverse, inclusive and strong movements of women human rights defenders, and recommendations addressed to all stakeholders to ensure that women defenders are supported and strengthened to promote and protect human rights.



I. Introduction

1. Women the world over have played a crucial role in advancing human rights. Not only have they shaped the architecture of the current international human rights system and held leadership roles in government, civil society and business but they also engage in daily acts “in small places, close to home”¹ that result in the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights.

2. Although often ignored, women have been at the forefront of social change throughout history. Eleanor Roosevelt was the driving force behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1956, 20,000 women of diverse backgrounds mobilized to protest apartheid in Pretoria. Tawakkol Karman in Yemen and Asmaa Mahfouz in Egypt played critical roles in sparking the mass uprisings in 2011 that led to regime change. Eleven-year-old Malala Yousafzai wrote about her life under the Taliban in 2009 and continues to be a passionate advocate for the right to education. In 2016, on what was known as Black Monday, thousands of women and girls in more than 60 Polish cities took to the streets, successfully stopping a total ban on abortion. In 2017, women and girls launched the powerful #MeToo movement, which continues to reverberate globally.

3. Women of diverse backgrounds promote and protect rights in very different contexts. There are, for instance, women calling for gender equality, indigenous women fighting for land and environmental rights, women in rural areas pressing for socioeconomic rights, girls campaigning on social issues, trans women speaking up against discrimination, lesbians calling for equality, migrant and refugee women advocating for their rights and security, homeless women demanding the right to housing and shelter, women fighting for justice for the disappeared, gender non-conforming persons resisting gender-based violence, women promoting choice and bodily autonomy, women expanding digital rights, women with disabilities fighting for independent living and women involved in peace processes.

4. They include women human rights lawyers representing victims in court, women journalists exposing issues of interest to the public, women union leaders calling for labour rights, women politicians and parliamentarians debating public issues, women judges upholding rights through the law, women in the police and the military protecting populations, women in the civil service developing policies, women in academia teaching and researching human rights, women leading communities, non-profit organizations and social movements for transformative change, women in intergovernmental organizations working with States to fulfil rights obligations, and women humanitarian workers, development workers and health workers providing access to essential services.

5. Because of decades of action by feminist defenders, women in many places now enjoy greater equality, including before the law, in politics, education, workplaces and marriage and at home. Because of feminist defenders, more women are able to enjoy the right to vote, the right to bodily autonomy, the right to privacy, the right to family life, sexual and reproductive rights and many other rights.

6. Nevertheless, many women defenders continue to face significant risks in their human rights practice. They often face the same risks that defenders who are men face, for women defenders, too, are subject to restrictions on rights and fundamental freedoms and live in the same social, cultural and political milieux that shape responses to human rights. However, women defenders often face additional and different risks and obstacles that are gendered, intersectional and shaped by entrenched gender stereotypes and deeply held ideas and norms about who women are and how women should be. Women, for example, can be stigmatized for the very same actions for which men are venerated. Women are often perceived not as agents of change but as vulnerable or victimized persons in need of protection by others, typically men. The rights of women to promote and protect human

¹ Eleanor Roosevelt, “Where do human rights begin?”, in *Courage in a Dangerous World*, Allida M. Black, ed. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 190.

rights continue to be challenged by those who believe that women do not have these rights or that they should fight for them only in limited, circumscribed ways.

7. In the current political climate, in which there is a backlash against human rights, women defenders are often the first to come under attack. In the present report, the Special Rapporteur calls on the international community to recognize the specific issues, challenges and risks that women defenders face in diverse circumstances and to ensure that such defenders are recognized and supported and enabled to participate equally, meaningfully and powerfully in the promotion and protection of human rights.

II. Methodology

8. The present report is based on numerous discussions that the Special Rapporteur has had with women human rights defenders around the world since the beginning of his mandate. The Special Rapporteur considers the security and protection of women human rights defenders to be a core aspect of his work and, wherever possible, has sought opportunities to meet and hear directly from them on official country visits and academic visits. The report draws on these discussions and on consultations held with women human rights defenders for the preparation of the present report in New York, Beirut, Geneva and Bali (Indonesia).

9. The report also draws on 181 communications concerning women human rights defenders sent to 60 States by the Special Rapporteur between 2 July 2014 and 2 October 2018. In those communications, the Special Rapporteur highlighted concerns about: the inclusion of women human rights defenders on a list of terrorists; death threats and harassment; defamation; smear campaigns; raids; deportation proceedings; interrogation; travel bans; asset freezes; surveillance; arrests and judicial harassment; detention, including incommunicado; mistreatment and denial of health care in detention; criminalization; attempted killings; killings; and disappearances.

10. Finally, it also draws on over 200 responses to the Special Rapporteur's survey, which were collected with the help of the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The aim of the survey was to gather information on women human rights defenders from States, national human rights institutions, civil society organisations, human rights defenders and other stakeholders. The respondents expressed concern about the situation of women human rights defenders at risk around the world and called for their recognition, security and protection.

III. Definition and normative framework

A. Definition

11. As women human rights defenders have observed, women are attacked for promoting and protecting human rights because of their identity and because of what they do.² Many women exercise rights described in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders) without identifying as women human rights defenders. Some women are unfamiliar with the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders or the term "human rights defenders". Some, for their own safety, deliberately avoid referring to their actions as being related to human rights. Some frame their work in different ways to access much-needed funding and support. Many women are engaged in the defence of human rights on a voluntary basis, outside professional or employment-related roles.

² Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, *Global Report on the Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders* (2012); A/HRC/16/44 and Corr.1.

12. The present report is focused on women engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights. References to women in the report also include girls and gender non-conforming persons affected by social constructions of women who promote and protect all types of rights. It builds on the foundational work of previous mandate holders Hina Jilani and Margaret Sekaggya in this area, including the report on the situation of women human rights defenders and those working on women's rights or gender issues presented to the Human Rights Council in 2011 (A/HRC/16/44 and Corr.1). Although the definition of defenders of women's human rights includes persons of all genders working on women's rights and gender issues, the focus of the present report is specifically on women who promote and protect human rights and the ways of building diverse, inclusive and strong movements of women human rights defenders around the world.

B. Normative framework

13. The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders sets out the rights of human rights defenders and states that everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels (art. 1).

14. The right to participate in public life, including the promotion and protection of human rights, is contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Both instruments also enshrine the rights of everyone to freedom of expression, opinion, association and assembly. Article 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires States parties to undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the Covenant, while article 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states the same in relation to economic, social and cultural rights. Equality before the law is recognized in the former Covenant (art. 26).

15. In its general comment No. 36 (2018) on article 6 of the Covenant, on the right to life, the Human Rights Committee states that the duty to protect the right to life requires States parties to take special measures of protection for persons in situations of vulnerability whose lives have been placed at particular risk by specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence, including human rights defenders. The Committee likewise states that article 6 also reinforces the obligations of States parties under the Covenant and the Optional Protocol to protect individuals against reprisals for promoting and striving to protect and realize human rights, including through cooperation or communication with the Committee, and that States parties must take the necessary measures to respond to death threats and to provide adequate protection to human rights defenders, including the creation and maintenance of a safe and enabling environment for defending human rights.

16. Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states that States parties must take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, must ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right (a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, (b) to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government and (c) to participate in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

17. In its general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women states that other factors that make it more difficult for women to gain access to justice include the stigmatization of women fighting for their rights. That human rights defenders and organizations are frequently targeted because of their work, the Committee also states, must be emphasized and their own right to access justice protected (para. 9). In general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, the Committee states that discrimination against women is inextricably linked to other factors that affect their lives, such as the stigmatization of women who fight for their rights,

including human rights defenders (para. 12). States parties are called on to encourage the media to eliminate discrimination against women, including the harmful and stereotypical portrayal of women or specific groups of women, such as women human rights defenders, from their activities (para. 30).

18. In its general comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence, the Committee on the Rights of the Child states that States should guarantee that adolescents' right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly in all its forms is fully respected, consistent with the restrictions delineated in article 15 (2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including through the provision of safe spaces for both girls and boys. Measures should also be introduced to protect adolescent human rights defenders, particularly girls, who often face gender-specific threats and violence (para. 45). On 28 September 2018, the Committee held a day of general discussion on protecting and empowering children as human rights defenders.

19. States have an obligation to protect women human rights defenders and ensure a safe and enabling environment for actions related to human rights. On 18 December 2013, the General Assembly adopted by consensus a landmark resolution on women human rights defenders, resolution 68/181, in which it called on States to, inter alia, protect women human rights defenders, respect and support their activities, condemn and prevent human rights violations and abuses as well as violence and discrimination against them, create a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights with a gender perspective, ensure that they can engage in peaceful protests, ensure that the promotion and protection of human rights are not criminalized and refrain from any act of intimidation or reprisal against them or their family members and associates for their cooperation with international institutions.

20. In its resolution 72/247, adopted in December 2017 in advance of the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders in 2018, the General Assembly continued to express particular concern about systemic and structural discrimination and violence faced by women human rights defenders of all ages, and reiterated its strong call upon States to take appropriate, robust and practical steps to protect women human rights defenders and to integrate a gender perspective into their efforts to create a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights, as called for by the Assembly in its resolution 68/181.

21. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has adopted several resolutions recognizing the threats and attacks against women human rights defenders in Africa and the need for measures to protect them and promote their work,³ including the Resolution on Measures to Protect and Promote the Work of Women Human Rights Defenders of 2016.⁴ The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has also called frequently on States in the region to take urgent measures to protect women human rights defenders.

22. In a statement given on International Women Human Rights Defenders Day, 29 November 2018, by the Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, women human rights defenders were recognized as key to the realization of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. They also play a critical role in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through which Governments have committed to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (Sustainable Development Goal 5) and other gender-specific targets.

³ Including ACHPR/Res.376 (LX) 2017, ACHPR/Res.345 (LVIII) 2016 and ACHPR/Res.245 (LIV) 13.

⁴ ACHPR/Res.336 (EXT.OS/XIX) 2016.

IV. Background and environment

23. In recent years, there have been significant gains for gender equality in intergovernmental spaces. However, greater resistance to the work of women human rights defenders has also emerged, at multiple levels and in many spaces.

24. These forms of resistance are linked to wider political developments, such as the rise of populism, fundamentalism and violent extremism. There has been a worrying rise in misogynistic, sexist and homophobic speech by prominent political leaders in recent years, normalizing violence against women and gender non-conforming persons. Women human rights defenders stress that they have been facing increased repression, violence and impunity despite formal State commitments to respect, protect and fulfil their legal human rights obligations without discrimination. In some cases, State actors have engaged in direct attacks against women defenders and their families, including through defamation campaigns, judicial harassment and criminalization. An increasing number of States in the global North and South have been restricting civil society space, imposing legal and administrative requirements that curtail the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, association and assembly.

25. A significant issue for women defenders is the reduction of funding for women's rights in recent years. In a study by a subsidiary body of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, it was found that in 2014, only 0.5 per cent (\$192 million) of aid for gender equality went to women's rights organizations in the North and South, compared to 1.2 per cent in 2011.⁵ Ninety-two per cent of the funding for gender equality went to international NGOs or NGOs in the donor country, and only 8 per cent to NGOs in developing countries.

26. Restrictive donor policies have also had a distinct impact on women defenders. For example, the policy of the United States of America entitled "Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance" (known as the global gag rule), which was introduced in 2017, requires NGOs receiving funding from the United States to certify that they do not engage in certain abortion-related activities, including counselling, referrals and advocacy on access to safe services. The policy has had an adverse impact on women defenders working on sexual and reproductive rights, HIV, sexual orientation and gender identity rights and sex workers' rights. It has reduced access to services for marginalized women, threatened the integration of health services and created division in civil society around the world.⁶

27. Efforts to question, subvert or co-opt international human rights law and weaken multilateral cooperation have also been made. There have been attempts to instil fear and sow discord between and within rights-based movements. There has also been renewed emphasis on "traditional values" and a resurgence of conservative narratives suggesting that the role of women should be limited to the private sphere, family and procreation. These trends subvert efforts to ensure that women in diverse circumstances enjoy substantive equality and the freedom to voice their opinions and participate meaningfully in processes that have an impact on their lives.

V. Contexts and root causes of violations

28. The reasons behind the targeting of women defenders are multifaceted and complex and depend on the specific contexts that they act in. Women defenders are often perceived as challenging traditional notions of family and gender roles in society, a perception that can generate hostility from State actors and from the public, the media and other non-State actors. They can be stigmatized and ostracized by community leaders, faith-based groups,

⁵ OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET), "Donor support to southern women's rights organizations" (November 2016).

⁶ International Women's Health Coalition, *Reality Check: Year One Impact of Trump's Global Gag Rule* (2018).

families, neighbours and communities in the belief that they and their actions are a threat to religion, honour, culture or ways of life.

29. Social constructions of gender are shaped by patriarchy and heteronormativity.⁷ Patriarchy – the privileging of men in social relations – often results in the disempowerment of women and their exclusion from decision-making processes. Patriarchal ideas circumscribe how and when women exercise voice and agency in the private and the public spheres. Similarly, heteronormativity – the privileging of heterosexuality and the rigid definition of gender identities, sexualities, and gender relations – reinforces clear distinctions between men and women. Heteronormative ideas render gender non-conforming persons invisible and reproduce expectations about how women and men should express their sexuality and gender; those who do not conform are cast as “deviant”, “abnormal” or “wicked”. Human rights defenders whose actions are perceived as challenging patriarchal and heteronormative systems tend to face threats and attacks, as they question understandings of women’s identity and their place and role that are taken for granted and disrupt gendered power relations.

30. In some societies, the risks that women human rights defenders face are also shaped by their position in castes, tribes, clans, ethnicities or races and nations. Fundamentalist ideologies simplify and homogenize identities; those who do not conform are excluded, or even punished for their “deviance”. Aggressors also stoke nationalist fears of women defenders, accusing them of being anti-national or foreign agents who are spreading foreign ideas and practices.

31. Of deep concern is the rise of the concept of “gender ideology” as posited by religious leaders, politicians and members of conservative groups, who, misunderstanding and misusing gender matters, describe the “ideology” as a threat to religious values, the family and morals in society (A/HRC/38/46, para. 14). In this view, put forward with particular vehemence in Latin America and Eastern Europe, “gender ideology” is positioned as the attempt by defenders of the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons and those of other diverse orientations and gender identities, and by feminists, to destabilize the political and social order; the supposed threat is being used to shape political outcomes and justify discrimination.

32. In some regions, militarization normalizes the use of force and violence; it often results in the idealization of violent masculinities. Militarization often changes local economies, affecting people’s access to their land, agriculture, water and resources. In many places, communities are terrorized by different parties in a conflict, accused by each of siding with the other. Ensuring security – particularly during and after conflicts and foreign occupation – also disrupts economic activities, impoverishing communities. Actions taken to prevent and counter violent extremism have resulted in women defenders being labelled as potential terrorists, thus silencing legitimate, peaceful dissent. Women also often find themselves excluded from peace processes.

33. Globalization and neoliberal policies have, moreover, led to economic disempowerment and power inequalities that affect that the rights of women. Non-State actors such as businesses, organized criminals, investors and financial institutions have been growing in power and influence over States and societies. Projects carried out in the name of economic development – for example, by extractive industries and agribusiness – have resulted in environmental destruction, displacement and high levels of human rights abuses and violence. Such projects often marginalize, impoverish and fragment communities and families. Women defenders have been at the forefront of protesting such changes and claiming their rights, often with far fewer resources than those whose actions they resist.

34. The difficulty of gaining access to justice and impunity for violations increases the risks faced by women defenders. In some contexts, people of different genders are not equal before the law. Women may be subject to tribe- or clan-based systems of adjudication

⁷ Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, *Gendering Documentation: A Manual for and about Women Human Rights Defenders* (2015).

that are independent of the laws of the State and can complicate their efforts to advance human rights. Many women defenders struggle to afford the legal fees they must pay to defend themselves from judicial harassment and criminalization. Reports to the police about crimes committed against them sometimes go unheeded. Impunity for human rights violations and abuses is a root cause of the threats and attacks they continue to endure.

VI. Gendered risks faced by women human rights defenders

35. The experiences of women defenders are diverse. They promote and protect human rights in very different circumstances. In doing so, they generally face greater risks and challenges than men do – risks that are gendered and intersectional. Aside from gender, aspects of their identities, such as age, religion, ethnicity, class, immigration or legal status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and the way those aspects intersect shape the way women human rights defenders are perceived and treated. Women defenders are not just targeted as individuals; they are also targeted because they belong to networks, collectives and movements, and attacks against them are meant to serve as warnings to others. Some of the risks and violations they experience have not been sufficiently understood, analysed, documented and exposed; some have not been treated as legitimate human rights concerns.

Non-recognition, marginalization and systematic exclusion

36. The first issue that women defenders face is that they and their actions are often rendered invisible or their contributions marginalized, sometimes subtly. It is common for their views to be ignored, treated with scepticism and belittled, including in human rights movements. Women are often relegated to support roles in groups and organizations, while men occupy formal positions and hold formal authority to make decisions that affect their lives. Women often find it more challenging to gain access to information and participate meaningfully in meetings and decision-making processes. Women defenders have expressed deep concern about the reluctance of organizations and social movements to address gender-based discrimination, violence, and the marginalization of women in their own structures and practices.⁸

Public shaming, stigmatization, attacks on honour and reputation

37. A powerful way of attacking women defenders is to damage their “honour” or reputation. Efforts to shame women have led to their stigmatization and isolation. In some contexts, women are often reduced to their roles as mothers, daughters and caregivers rather than seen as legitimate political and economic actors in all spheres of society. In particular, in conservative societies, women defenders are derided for their efforts to create change. They are labelled “bad mothers”, “difficult”, “loose”, “loud”, “nasty” or “witches”. They are cast as “unbelievers”, “atheists”, “guerrillas”, “separatists”, “the enemy within”, “traitors”, “anti-nationalists” or “terrorists”.

38. Sexuality baiting is a tactic commonly used to attack women defenders. Comments and insinuations about their sexuality, sexual orientation and reproductive or marital status are used to discredit their work. They are falsely accused of being promiscuous or engaging in prostitution. They are referred to derogatorily as “divorcees” or “lesbians”.

39. Public shaming is an effective tactic because it alienates women, often turning family members, colleagues and neighbours against them. Where families and communities are the primary source of protection, this tactic can leave women defenders vulnerable to physical attacks and psychological harm. As a result, some of them retreat to activities permitted by custom and tradition, which are less heavily regulated by law.

⁸ Association for Women’s Rights in Development, *Women Human Rights Defenders Confronting Extractive Industries: An Overview of Critical Risks and Human Rights Obligations* (2017).

Risks, threats and attacks in the private sphere and against families and loved ones

40. Women defenders face distinct risks in the private sphere. They have at times – girls especially – been forcibly confined at home by family members to prevent them from engaging in human rights activism. Some experience domestic violence because of their activism, as partners or parents subject them to verbal and physical abuse to pressure them into ceasing their efforts. They have been separated from their children by their husbands as a form of punishment. Women are sometimes targeted on their way home or while they are at home.

41. Family members and loved ones of women defenders – in particular, their children, partners, relatives and close friends – have been targeted by aggressors to coerce them into giving up their activism. Such attacks trigger deep feelings of guilt in women defenders; this pain is deepened when others blame them for causing these attacks.

Physical attacks, sexual violence, torture, killings and enforced disappearances

42. The threat of violence, including sexual violence, is often used to silence women defenders. Even rumours alone, for example, of sexual violence committed during detention or imprisonment, can be damaging. Women defenders are also at risk of femicide, rape, acid attacks, arbitrary arrest, detention, killings and enforced disappearances.

43. On 31 July 2018, anti-corruption campaigner Kateryna Handzyuk was attacked by an unknown man with sulfuric acid in Kherson, Ukraine, and died three months later.⁹ Ms. Handzyuk, a member of the executive committee of Kherson City Council, had exposed the corruption of local authorities, including the police. The killing was one in a series of brutal attacks against human rights defenders, for which few perpetrators have been brought to justice.

44. The Special Rapporteur is concerned about the enforced disappearances of three women defenders in Saudi Arabia – Samar Badawi and Nassima al-Sadah,¹⁰ who had campaigned for civil and political rights, including for the lifting of the ban on female drivers and the end of the guardianship system that makes women legally and socially dependent on men,¹¹ and Amal al-Harbi, who had campaigned for the release of her imprisoned husband, Fowzan al-Harbi, a human rights defender. All three women were arrested on 30 July 2018 by the Mabahith State security forces in the wake of a government crackdown on public figures and other human rights defenders that began in September 2017 and a wave of arrests of women defenders in May 2018. They remain detained in the Al-Mabahith prison in Dhahban.

Online harassment, violence and attacks

45. Women human rights defenders are often subjected to online harassment, violence and attacks, which include threats of sexual violence, verbal abuse, sexuality baiting, doxing (a practice in which private information about a person is shared online by others) and public shaming. Such abuse occurs in comments on news articles, blogs, websites and social media. The online terror and slander to which women are subjected can also lead to physical assault. Women defenders have been maligned by “deepfake” videos, in which images and videos are combined and manipulated to create computer-generated replicas of them saying and doing things they have not done. Women are often unable to defend themselves from these acts.

⁹ See also press release from International Federation for Human Rights dated 16 November 2018. Available from www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/ukraine-suspect-arrested-in-the-killing-of-katerina-gandzyuk-fighting#.

¹⁰ References are made throughout the document to urgent appeals and allegation letters sent by the Special Rapporteur. All such communications are available from <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>. With respect to Ms. Badawi and Ms. al-Sadah, see UA SAU 11/2018.

¹¹ Alkarama, “Saudi Arabia: crackdown on human rights defenders continues unabated” (9 August 2018).

46. In April 2018, Indian investigative journalist Rana Ayyub was subjected to an online hate campaign and death threats when she was misquoted on Twitter.¹² She was threatened with sexual violence on social media and subjected to misogynistic vitriol and hate speech for being a Muslim woman. A deepfake pornographic video manipulated to include her face was circulated. She was doxed and bombarded with sexual messages. Her reports to the police were not taken seriously, and the perpetrators have yet to be brought to justice.

Judicial harassment and criminalization

47. The Special Rapporteur has received many reports of women defenders being subjected to judicial harassment and criminalization. Women defenders whose activism is interpreted as a challenge to religious customs have been charged with blasphemy; women who work on sexual and reproductive rights have been charged with violating so-called public morality laws. False accusations have been made against women defenders, for example, stating that they are engaged in adultery and prostitution or in terrorist acts. They have also been subjected to strategic lawsuits against public participation by businesses, to intimidate and silence them.

Denial of participation, restrictions and reprisals for engagement with international and regional human rights systems

48. Women defenders have been excluded from engagement with multilateral institutions, intergovernmental organizations and regional bodies on human rights issues; some have been subjected to reprisals when they have engaged with them all the same. States sometimes delegitimize their work, restricting or prohibiting their participation in international meetings. NGOs have been excluded through the General Assembly's no-objection procedure, which allows Member States to veto the participation of any NGO without providing a reason. Gaining access to international meetings often poses challenges, such as obtaining visas and funding for travel and even entry to buildings. Women defenders have also reported experiencing sexism, misogyny and racism in multilateral spaces.¹³

49. A method of undermining women in civil society is the formation of government-organized "NGOs", which then make representations in intergovernmental spaces.¹⁴ Such organizations advocate for the support of government policies, enabling States to claim that they cooperate with and support civil society groups while sidelining their critics. They also create an impression of conflict and fragmentation in civil society.

50. Women defenders have been subjected to travel bans, harassment, interrogation, arbitrary detention and physical attacks before and after meetings. On 26 October 2017, for example, five special procedure mandate holders expressed concern over allegations of physical attacks, intimidation and harassment of the executive director of a coalition of human rights defenders of Central Africa, Maximilienne Ngo Mbe, after she participated in the review of Cameroon by the Human Rights Committee (A/HRC/39/41, annex I, para. 7).

51. Of concern to the Special Rapporteur is the withdrawal by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights of the observer status of the Coalition of African Lesbians on 8 August 2018¹⁵ on the basis of a 2015 decision by the African Union Executive Council wherein the Council considered the Coalition to be an NGO attempting to impose values contrary to African values.¹⁶ As civil society organizations have noted,¹⁷ this withdrawal of

¹² UA IND 10/2018.

¹³ Submission prepared by the Sexual Rights Initiative, International Women's Health Coalition, Independent Consultant Cynthia Rothschild and Association for Women's Rights in Development. Available at www.ohchr.org/Documents/AboutUs/CivilSociety/Procedures/CivilSociety/JointInputSIRI_%20IWH C_CynthiaRothschild_AWRD.pdf.

¹⁴ Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, *Suffocating the Movement: Shrinking Space for Women's Rights* (2018).

¹⁵ EX.CL./Dec.1015 (XXXIII), para. 8 (vii).

¹⁶ EX.CL./Dec.887 (XXVII), para. 7.

¹⁷ See <http://independenceachpr.org/>.

status raises concerns about the Commission's independence and impartiality, views of women's rights and sexual rights and the space for defending human rights in the continent.

Threats to status

52. In some situations, women defenders have experienced threats to their status, whether as citizens, migrants or refugees. In Bahrain, women defenders are at risk of denaturalization. Some women defenders on the move are fearful that their work permits may be revoked or their asylum claims jeopardized because of their activism (see A/HRC/37/51). In November 2018, Ana Quirós,¹⁸ director of the NGO Centro de Información y Servicios de Asesoría en Salud, was stripped of her Nicaraguan citizenship of over 20 years and deported to Costa Rica.

53. Women defenders who seek asylum in other countries are vulnerable to extradition requests. According to information provided to the Special Rapporteur, in 2017, opposition activist, journalist and blogger Zhanara Akhmetova, who had sought asylum in Ukraine, was detained for a month in a pre-detention centre in Kyiv because of an extradition request by Kazakhstan.

Physical incarceration

54. Some women are held against their will for their activism, for example in immigration detention centres or psychiatric institutions. Young lesbian defenders have been incarcerated and forced to undergo treatment to "correct" their homosexuality.¹⁹

55. According to information received by the Special Rapporteur, in March 2018, the Kazakh activist and blogger Ardak Ashym was forcibly placed in a psychiatric facility for over a month and subjected to psychiatric treatment, including with psychotropic drugs.²⁰ She was accused of inciting social discord under article 174 of the Criminal Code of Kazakhstan and of insulting a State official through the mass media under article 378. She was released after international pressure and went abroad to avoid forced hospitalization.

Attacks against collectives and movements of women human rights defenders

56. At times, States specifically target feminists and movements of women defenders, using different forms of repression, criminalization, hate speech and the incitement of violence.

57. Since the outbreak of the political crisis in Nicaragua in April 2018, for example, the Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative (IM-Defensoras) has documented the cases of 273 women human rights defenders who have experienced 370 different types of attacks.²¹ More than a hundred such women were arbitrarily detained by the police and/or paramilitaries, of which 53 remain detained and 40 have been formally charged. Two trans women defenders were executed. Around 75 women defenders have been forcibly displaced internally or externally, and 22 had to flee with their families. Women defenders, their organizations and their families have experienced harassment, surveillance and threats and have been slandered and defamed systematically by the Nicaraguan Government and its allies.

VII. Challenges and risks faced by specific groups of women human rights defenders

58. A woman human rights defender may belong to several of the following groups.

¹⁸ AL NIC 4/2018.

¹⁹ Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, *Claiming Rights, Claiming Justice: A Guidebook on Women Human Rights Defenders* (2007).

²⁰ Amnesty International, "Kazakhstan: civil activist detained in psychiatric facility – Ardak Ashym", (27 April 2018).

²¹ Data are from the Nicaraguan Women Human Rights Defenders Initiative and the registry of attacks against such defenders of IM-Defensoras (November 2018).

Girl human rights defenders

59. In August 2018, 15-year-old Greta Thunberg of Sweden began a school strike on Fridays to protest inaction by the Government of Sweden on climate change, inspiring thousands of other students to do likewise in other countries. When she was 8 years old, Amariyanna Copeny called attention to the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, in the United States, by writing to President Barack Obama and continues to be a prominent activist. Sixteen-year-old Palestinian Ahed Tamimi was detained in December 2017 in connection with her human rights work against Israeli occupation, land confiscation and settlement construction. She was sentenced to eight months of imprisonment.²²

60. Girls the world over promote and protect a wide range of rights – not just the right to education and gender equality – but because of their age, dependent status and other aspects of their identities they often face challenges. Perceived as too young or immature to participate in human rights activism, they are often sidelined or just given token attention. They are not given the same access to resources, knowledge and technologies as older human rights defenders. Funding is often inaccessible, as most girls do not have the track records and organizational structures required by funders. As they often lack the means to support themselves independently, losing family support because of their activism can be devastating. Support from fellow human rights defenders, especially girls, is crucial.

Gender non-conforming defenders

61. Gender non-conforming persons do not conform to gender norms in, for example, their behaviour, dress or activities. They can be subjected to threats and attacks for their gender non-conformity, including from fellow defenders.

62. The Special Rapporteur is concerned about the situation of student transgender activist Victoria Obando, who was arrested by paramilitaries in León, Nicaragua, on 25 August 2018 for participating in student demonstrations against the Government. She remains at risk of mistreatment while she is held in a men's prison, La Modelo.

Indigenous women human rights defenders and women human rights defenders from minority groups

63. Indigenous women defenders are often involved in protecting their rights to their lands, territory and natural resources. They often resist the actions of corporations and local authorities that are much better resourced. Geographically dispersed and often living in rural areas, they can find it difficult to connect with fellow women defenders.

64. Women defenders belonging to minority groups are often at greater risk of prejudice and discrimination because of their activism and their minority backgrounds. In Chhattisgarh, India, for example, Adivasi schoolteacher Soni Sori continues to be slandered, harassed and intimidated by the police for her activism.²³ In February 2016, she was the victim of an acid attack by unidentified assailants who warned her not to complain about the Inspector General of Bastar District and threatened her daughter. In 2011, she was arrested on eight charges. She was acquitted of seven of them and granted bail in connection with the eighth. While in custody, she reported being tortured and sexually harassed.

65. Sudha Bhardwaj, a lawyer who assists Adivasis, Dalits, workers and farmers, endured a vicious smear campaign and was arrested on 28 August 2018 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.²⁴ Her house was raided, her personal items seized, and she has been placed under house arrest.

²² UA ISR 1/2018.

²³ AL IND 1/2016.

²⁴ AL IND 16/2018; AL IND 21/2018.

Women human rights defenders with disabilities

66. Women defenders with disabilities often have a harder time defending their rights because of their disabilities and the effects on their standard of living. Depending on the disabilities and barriers in society they live with, they may face obstacles to communication, social interaction and access to information and spaces of dialogue, as well as financial precarity. They may need reasonable accommodations and specific support to enable them to conduct activism, such as accompaniment, human and/or technical support and transportation assistance. Those with disabilities such as autism may not perceive danger signals and may be more vulnerable to violations and abuses.

Women journalists and lawyers

67. Women journalists and lawyers face high risks, often because, exposing issues and challenging those in power, they are highly visible. In 2018 alone, three journalists were victims of targeted attacks – Leslie Ann Pamela Montenegro del Real was killed in Mexico, Maharram Durrani in Afghanistan and Wendi Winters in the United States. In 2017, Reporters Without Borders notes, 10 women journalists were killed, often as they persevered in the face of threats, harassment and intimidation. Women lawyers are sometimes accused of protecting criminals or stigmatized for defending the rights of marginalized minorities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons and those of other diverse orientations and gender identities. They are sometimes subjected to gender-based discrimination by colleagues and judges and mistreated by the police.

Women human rights defenders in prominent and leadership positions

68. Women leaders who represent their groups and speak out on issues tend to be targeted for their visibility – not only to silence them but also to discourage broader dissent.

69. In the Philippines, Senator Leila de Lima has been in detention since February 2017 for denouncing President Rodrigo Duterte’s War on Drugs, which has led to violence, extrajudicial killings and human rights violations.²⁵ She has been held on politically motivated, non-bailable charges for violating the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002; while in detention, she has been subject to restrictions.

70. Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines Maria Lourdes Sereno was unseated in May 2018 by a Supreme Court decision widely considered unconstitutional.²⁶ Ms. Sereno had objected to President Duterte’s policies on drugs and martial law, after which he publicly pushed for her resignation. When she refused to resign, he pushed for her impeachment, even ordering Congress to remove her. Also in the Philippines, award-winning journalist Maria Ressa, chief executive officer of the news website Rappler, has been indicted on tax evasion charges, in what is considered political persecution in response to critical reporting on the Government.

Women human rights defenders in conflict and post-conflict situations and living under occupation

71. Women often find it more challenging to promote and protect rights when they live in insecure and unstable environments. Where non-State actors dominate, State authorities may have little power or control. Religious non-State actors may impose restrictions on behaviour and dress, subjecting women to discipline for perceived infractions.

72. For example, women living in Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) face restrictions that make it difficult and dangerous to engage in public spaces, much less in human rights activism. In Afghanistan, women defenders have been displaced from several provinces because of Taliban attacks, affecting their level of engagement. In Yemen, they have experienced verbal and physical violence, and militant groups have

²⁵ Amnesty International, “Philippines: drop politically motivated charges against Senator de Lima and ensure her immediate and unconditional release” (27 August 2018).

²⁶ Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, “Statement of the Commission on Human Rights on the Supreme Court decision to oust Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno”, (15 May 2018).

broken into their homes and offices. In Sri Lanka, women defenders in grass-roots areas documenting war crimes have been placed under surveillance. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, women defenders have faced severe restrictions on their activities, including limitations on funding, and have been subject to the excessive use of force when they engage in peaceful protests. Women are also often excluded from peace processes, including in post-conflict settings.

Women human rights defenders on the move

73. Women defenders on the move include refugees, internal and international migrants, internally displaced persons, victims of smuggling and trafficking and the stateless (see A/HRC/37/51). They include women who have been forced into exile – temporarily or permanently – because of the risks related to their activism. Women defenders on the move face many restrictions. Those with precarious status and who live in irregular situations often fear retaliation for their activism, including arrest, detention and deportation.

Women human rights defenders deprived of their liberty

74. Women in forced confinement struggle to advocate for their rights. They are at risk of mistreatment, medical negligence, isolation, inhuman and degrading treatment and torture. Women defenders have been coerced into signing confessions or have received prison sentences in absentia despite being in government custody.

75. The Special Rapporteur is concerned about the situation of women defenders in Isa Town Prison for women in Bahrain, who, as noted by civil society in a joint letter of October 2018,²⁷ were allegedly subjected to reprisals in September 2018 for the attention drawn to their situation by the United Nations and the British Parliament. According to reports, Hajar Mansoor Hasan,²⁸ Najah Yusuf and Medina Ali were beaten harshly and kept in isolation. Following the assault, Ms. Mansoor required hospitalization. Prison authorities applied restrictions to all inmates and prison conditions deteriorated. On 14 October 2018, the three women launched a hunger strike in protest over inhumane conditions.

76. The Special Rapporteur looks forward to the forthcoming report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and practice on women deprived of liberty, to be presented at the forty-first session of the Human Rights Council in June 2019.

Women human rights defenders working on land and environment rights

77. Global Witness reported that 2017 was the deadliest year on record for land and environmental rights defenders.²⁹ Women defending their lands, territories and rights related to the environment are often at a disadvantage in their activism. They are often excluded from land ownership, community negotiations and decisions about the future of their lands. When they engage in activism, they are often criticized for neglecting their domestic duties and endangering their families. In some cases, perpetrators deliberately target women in communities as a strategy of intimidation and fear.

78. Feminist indigenous leader Berta Cáceres³⁰ was shot and killed at her home in La Esperanza in Honduras in 2016. She had been facing sexual harassment, death threats and spurious criminal charges for her work in defending land and environmental rights. While eight men accused of her murder have been brought to trial, there are serious concerns, including among the family members, about the conduct of the trial. The Special Rapporteur continues to monitor developments in this case and urges the Government of Honduras to ensure that the trial is fair.

²⁷ Available at <http://birdbh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Joint-letter-by-NGOs-3-Bahraini-WHRDs-18-October-2018.pdf>.

²⁸ UA BHR 4/2017.

²⁹ Global Witness, *At what cost?* (2018).

³⁰ AL OTH 8/2017, AL OTH 9/2017, AL HND 4/2017, AL HND 4/2016, UA HND 2/2016, UA HND 4/2013.

Women human rights defenders working on women’s rights, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive rights, including sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression

79. Persistent discrimination in family, cultural and sexual and reproductive rights have a debilitating impact on the capacity of women to claim equal standing in all aspects of life and promote and protect human rights.

80. Women working on women’s rights and gender equality act on diverse issues. They highlight how laws and practices concerning inheritance, land and property leave daughters and wives subjugated and impoverished. They act to eliminate domestic violence, incest, early and forced marriage, marital rape and female genital mutilation. They call for women and girls to have the autonomy to make decisions about their lives and their bodies and access to safe and legal abortion.

81. These issues are often considered private or shameful matters, leading family members to pressure the women to give up their advocacy efforts. These are also issues that may be perceived as challenging religious and cultural norms and may trigger a backlash from religious and conservative groups.

82. Women defenders also stress that when they provide direct assistance and support to women survivors of violence, they put themselves in danger of harm. Safe houses or the offices of women defenders who find themselves subject to stalking, intimidation and threats sometimes receive no police protection.

Women defenders working on sex workers’ rights

83. Sex workers are often stigmatized and treated as if they are not deserving of rights. Some sex workers who have sought help from the police for crimes perpetrated against them have been ignored, mistreated and subjected to sexual violence. Women who defend sex workers’ rights have also endured smear campaigns, threats and attacks.

84. Angélica Miriam Quintanilla, the director of Liquidambar, a sex worker-led organization in El Salvador, was found murdered on 6 May 2016 in an area known for sex work. There has been no progress in the investigation into her killing.

VIII. Building diverse, inclusive and strong movements of women human rights defenders

85. Women defenders advance rights both individually and collectively. They draw strength and sustenance from each other, their families and communities. There are no short cuts to building diverse, inclusive and strong movements of women defenders. It requires the wholesale dismantling of harmful gender stereotypes and a radical reimagining of the world so that understandings of gender are not used to legitimize the domination and marginalization of women. Also required is an intersectional analysis of power relations that clarifies how gender interacts with such factors as age, race, ethnicity and disability to affect the risks and obstacles faced by women defenders and their space for action. Everyone must question harmful gender stereotypes and reflect on how expectations, conscious and unconscious biases and actions affect the rights and freedoms of women in diverse circumstances. This requires State actors to meet their legal obligations, and non-State actors to work with them. Recognition, commitment, resources and structural change are required.

86. In consultation with women defenders, the Special Rapporteur has identified eight interconnected priorities for action that require attention, resources and cooperation among States, national human rights institutions, donors, civil society, human rights defenders and other stakeholders.

Priority 1: Publicly recognize the importance of the equal and meaningful participation of women human rights defenders at every level and in every institution in society, devoting resources to achieve this aim in accordance with the principle of substantive equality

87. There should be a significant increase in the number of women defenders represented at all levels of decision-making in government, civil society and business. Women defenders of all backgrounds and circumstances should be listened to and their contributions taken seriously in a sustained manner. They should be invited not just to share their experiences or stories; their expertise and perspectives should be valued.

88. A commitment to the equal and meaningful participation of women defenders must be expressed publicly by leaders in all sectors of society. This message should be conveyed consistently, including in political dialogue, media communications and education.

89. Where women defenders might face disadvantages that restrict their meaningful participation in decision-making processes, tailored programmes should be developed to ensure that they have the access to the knowledge, information and resources needed. Such programmes should consider diversity among women, including their age, geographical location, ethnicity, disabilities, religious beliefs, caste, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Priority 2: Ensure that women human rights defenders enjoy freedom of movement and have safe spaces and communication channels that enable them to meet and share ideas, experiences, resources, tactics and strategies regularly

90. Women human rights defenders need to be able to network, meet and communicate regularly at the local, regional and international levels. Women defenders have emphasized the importance of building partnerships and sister solidarities across geographical divides. This is often more difficult for women living in developing countries, under repressive regimes and in fragile and conflict-affected countries. These spaces and channels are also opportunities for mutual capacity-building and thus to gain access to greater knowledge, resources, skills and networks for their human rights practice.

91. Women defenders must define their own protection strategies in safe spaces. Women-only spaces should cut across cultures, age groups and the rural-urban divide, enabling women to raise common concerns, define collective action and, over time, develop strong networks for greater influence and self-protection.

92. Safety networks diminish the isolation of women defenders and provide a sense of belonging and support. They enable women defenders to better understand and confront sexism and violence by fostering a shared understanding of the impact of these dynamics and encouraging collective approaches to safety, well-being and survival. These contextual analyses enable women and their organizations to strategize, respond to and prevent violence. Such networks help women feel strong enough to push for more inclusive and feminist social justice movements.

Priority 3: Build a safe and enabling environment for women and all other human rights defenders to promote and protect human rights, ensuring that all non-State actors respect human rights and that all State actors respect, protect and fulfil human rights

93. Protection begins with the creation and sustenance of an enabling environment for the promotion and protection of human rights. States should disseminate and build awareness of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders at all levels, for example, through education in schools and public campaigns.

94. States must ensure that domestic laws and administrative practices recognize and protect the rights of all persons to promote and protect human rights. Examples of good practice include the January 2018 adoption by Mali of a law on human rights defenders that includes specific protection for women defenders. Similarly, the Law on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights Defenders adopted by Côte d'Ivoire in June 2014 specifically recognizes the threats faced by women defenders and their protection needs.

95. States must review, amend and repeal laws that restrict the rights of human rights defenders, including the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, assembly and association. Laws should not be used to harass or criminalize women defenders. Instead, laws should protect women defenders from discrimination, marginalization, slander, hate speech and hate crime, on- or offline.

96. National human rights institutions play an important role in monitoring and investigating the situation of human rights defenders and should have the independence and resources to achieve these aims, as noted in a report submitted by a previous mandate holder (A/HRC/25/55).

Priority 4: Document and investigate all forms of risk, threats and attacks against women human rights defenders, ensuring that perpetrators – both State and non-State actors – are brought to justice and that these defenders have access to an effective remedy, including gender-responsive reparations

97. The risks, threats and attacks faced by women defenders should be monitored and trends analysed so that precautionary measures can be taken. States should clarify how and with whom women defenders should report concerns and lodge complaints about risks, threats and attacks. Reports of risks, threats, and attacks originating in both the private and the public sphere should be taken seriously.

98. States should ensure the prompt and effective investigation of intimidation, threats, violence and other attacks against women defenders, whether committed by State or non-State actors. Prosecutors and judges should take these threats and attacks seriously, operating independently and with gender sensitivity to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice while safeguarding the dignity and security of women defenders.

Priority 5: Develop protection mechanisms and initiatives that incorporate the Special Rapporteur’s seven principles underpinning good protection practices

99. Women defenders need access to the right protection initiatives and resources on an ongoing basis, especially in emergencies. Funders have developed processes and mechanisms to ensure that women around the world have access to fast, flexible and responsive support when they face immediate threats. Other valuable responses include urgent actions, emergency relocation, legal aid and accompaniment. Protection strategies must focus on the gender-based violence faced by women defenders, including when it occurs in families, organizations or communities.

100. The Special Rapporteur has previously highlighted seven principles that underpin good protection practices, namely, they should adopt a rights-based, inclusive approach; recognize that defenders are diverse and might not self-identify as human rights defenders; exhibit gender sensitivity, with an intersectional approach to assessing risk and designing protection initiatives; focus on the “holistic security” of defenders, in particular their physical safety, digital security and psychosocial well-being; be oriented to protecting groups, family members and loved ones, along with individual defenders; invite participation, not least by involving defenders in the choice of strategies and tactics; and prove flexible, so that the specific needs and circumstances of defenders are taken into account (see A/HRC/31/55).

Priority 6: Recognize that security must be understood holistically and that it encompasses physical safety, digital security, environmental security, economic stability, the freedom to practice cultural and religious beliefs and the mental and emotional well-being of women defenders and their families and loved ones

101. The security of women defenders is multidimensional and should not be understood as physical safety alone. It is therefore critical for women defenders to be provided with multidimensional forms of support. In the face of online attacks and increased surveillance in particular, digital security has become increasingly important. Women defenders have also highlighted concerns about their economic security and their mental and emotional well-being.

102. Support should be provided to women defenders so that they are able to acquire knowledge and develop skills and capacities to conduct risk assessment and take mitigation measures, develop individual and collective security plans and protocols, deal with stigmatization, smear campaigns and online harassment, develop creative tactics and strategies for advocacy that lower the risks of retaliation and engage in practices for self- and collective care and well-being.

Priority 7: Recognize that sexism and discrimination against women, girl and gender non-conforming defenders exist in communities and human rights movements and take measures to address them

103. Women defenders and their contributions are often made invisible, including within human rights movements. Those working on issues that challenge social, cultural or religious norms have found that they receive limited support from fellow defenders. For human rights movements to thrive, causes of discrimination, marginalization and fragmentation within movements must be addressed. More effort is needed to build solidarity between different groups in human rights movements and bridges with other movements.

Priority 8: Ensure that funding enables women defenders in their diverse circumstances to promote and protect human rights in a continuous, sustainable and effective manner

104. The way funding operates is critical. Funding can strengthen and sustain women's participation in human rights movements, but it can also diminish it. Short-term, project-oriented funding that does not cover staffing and core costs, for example, can be damaging to smaller NGOs. Funds with highly bureaucratic reporting requirements can also be inaccessible and impractical. Women defenders are chronically underfunded, especially those working on politically sensitive topics. More should be done to ensure that women working in grass-roots organizations, community-based organizations and small NGOs receive the funding they need.

105. Funders should be attentive to the multidimensional security needs of women defenders. Women defenders should be given the support they need to take measures for their physical safety, digital security, economic security and mental and emotional well-being. Such support might include making provision for security measures, security training, training on software and hardware for digital security, legal aid, bail, emergency relocation, health insurance, pensions, social security and well-being-related activities.

106. In one example of good practice, the With and For Girls Collective took 12 girl activists from different countries to the Human Rights Funders Network conference in Mexico City in October 2018. The girls developed 10 pledges that they would like funders to make – namely, to fund capacity-building, networking and mentoring opportunities for girl-led organizations; to fund informal, non-established groups; to make grant processes more accessible; to increase core and long-term funding of girl-led and girl-centred groups; to include girls in strategic decision-making; to acknowledge the intersectionality of girls' issues; to ensure that there are protocols to give girls platforms from which to speak candidly about issues, beyond the confines of organizational alignment; to see girls not as trends or gimmicks but as real change makers; to collaborate with girls at the board level; and to actively seek out diverse, marginalized and hard-to-reach groups.

IX. Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

107. **In conclusion, the Special Rapporteur recognizes and celebrates the significance of women defenders in the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide. Women have been critical to the furtherance of human rights worldwide, but, because of the way aspects of their identities and their actions are perceived, they continue to face systematic discrimination, marginalization and repression. The**

Special Rapporteur calls on all stakeholders to work together to ensure that women defenders are supported and strengthened to promote and protect human rights.

Recommendations

108. The Special Rapporteur recommends that Member States:

(a) Protect the rights of women defenders, including by taking a public stand against all State and non-State actors who violate these rights, ceasing all attacks and threats against women defenders and investigating all that occur, ensuring that impunity does not prevail;

(b) Ensure that women defenders enjoy a safe and enabling environment to exercise their rights, considering their specific and diverse needs. This includes addressing systemic and structural discrimination and violence that women defenders experience and enacting laws that recognize and protect the rights of all human rights defenders, with a specific focus on the needs of women defenders;

(c) Ensure that non-State actors – including businesses, faith-based groups, the media and communities – meet their legal obligations to respect human rights. The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights are key for business enterprises;

(d) Prioritize the protection of women defenders in online spaces and adopt laws, policies and practices that protect their right to privacy and protect them from libel and hate speech;

(e) Dedicate part of their budget to strengthening the participation of women in human rights activities, ensuring that they are supported to respond meaningfully to issues in a sustainable manner;

(f) Refrain from interfering with funding provided to women for human rights work and ensure that legal and administrative frameworks do not restrict access to funding for human rights activism;

(g) Address barriers to the participation of women defenders in public life, including in regional and international human rights forums, such as travel bans, visa restrictions and their lack of identity or travel documents and resources;

(h) Assess protection practices for women defenders against the seven principles underpinning good protection practices and examine ways of strengthening those practices.

109. The Special Rapporteur recommends that multilateral institutions, intergovernmental organizations and regional bodies:

(a) Identify ways in which the right to promote and protect human rights and women's rights are being opposed and take measures to counter regression;

(b) Ensure that women defenders who engage with multilateral institutions and international and regional human rights bodies can do so without fear of persecution or violence and that any allegations or instances of reprisals are promptly investigated;

(c) Recognize the initiatives, strategies and networks created by women defenders themselves and ensure that they are adequately resourced;

(d) Strengthen and support women's leadership and feminist, community-centred approaches to protection;

(e) Renew efforts to ensure the security, protection and well-being of women human rights defenders, while respecting confidentiality, the need for informed consent and the principle "do no harm";

(f) Ensure that there is effective follow-up, implementation and accountability for recommendations to Member States concerning the security and protection of women defenders.

110. The Special Rapporteur recommends that national human rights institutions, civil society, human rights defenders of all genders, donors and other stakeholders:

- (a) Document, monitor and denounce the threats and attacks faced by women defenders, highlighting whether perpetrators were brought to justice;
 - (b) Respond to women defenders' concerns about sexism, discrimination and marginalization within communities and human rights movements, including by taking measures to prevent those phenomena;
 - (c) Develop and support specific programmes of work on the security and protection of women defenders, recognizing their diversity;
 - (d) Develop a deeper understanding of how protection practices can be gender-sensitive, by viewing them through the lens of intersectionality;
 - (e) Assess protection practices led by multiple stakeholders for women defenders against the seven principles underpinning good protection practices and examine ways of strengthening these practices.
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