

38th session of the Human Rights Council
Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women
Panel 1: The impact of violence against women human rights defenders and women's organizations in digital spaces

Concept note (as of 1 June 2018)

- Date and venue:** **Thursday, 21 June 2018, 4 - 6 p.m., Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva**
(will be broadcast live and archived on <http://webtv.un.org>)
- Objectives:** The panel will provide an opportunity to address the specific impact of online violence on the work of women human rights defenders and to discuss existing experiences and promising practices to address this violence. Issues to be discussed include:
- (1) Identifying and analysing the forms and impact of online violence experienced by women human rights defenders and women's organizations;
 - (2) Exploring initiatives implemented towards preventing and addressing the culture of violence and discrimination against women online at national, regional and global levels;
 - (3) Gaps and challenges in preventing and responding to online violence against women human rights defenders at normative and institutional levels.
- Chair:** **H.E. Mr. Vojislav Šuc**, President of the Human Rights Council
- Opening statement:** **Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein**, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Moderator:** **Ms. Dubravka Šimonović**, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (Croatia)
- Panellists:**
- **Ms. Nighat Dad**, Executive Director, Digital Rights Foundation (Pakistan)
 - **Ms. Seyi Akiwowo**, Politician and activist, Glitch!UK (Nigeria/United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
 - **Mr. Matt Mitchell**, Director of Digital Safety and Privacy, Tactical Technology Collective (United States of America)
- Outcome:** A summary report of the panel discussion will be prepared.
- Mandate:** In its resolution 6/30, the Human Rights Council reaffirmed the principle of gender equality and the need for the full implementation of the human rights of women and decided to hold an annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women. The Council further expressed, in its resolution 31/32, particular concern about systemic and structural discrimination and violence faced by women human rights defenders of all ages, and called upon all States to protect their rights and integrate a gender perspective into all efforts towards prevention and protection. Furthermore, in its resolution 32/13, the Human Rights Council affirmed that the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online. The panel discussion will address violence against women on line and its specific impact on women human rights defenders.
- Format:** The duration of the panel discussion will be limited to two hours. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statement, moderator comments, if any, panellist presentations, and their responses to questions and concluding remarks. Speaking time limits for the panellists and guests, if any, will be calculated based on the maximum one hour limit for the podium.
- States and observers, including national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), intervening from the floor will also have a maximum of one hour. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask questions. The list of speakers for the discussion will be established at the beginning of the panel and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups will be moved to the beginning of the list.

The practice of having two slots for Member and observer States (2x12), NHRIs (2x1) and NGOs (2x2) will be maintained but the possibility for panellists to intervene in-between will depend entirely on the time used at the start of the panel.

Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

Accessibility for persons with disabilities:

In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the panel will be made fully accessible. During the debate, international sign interpretation and real-time captioning will be provided and webcasted. In room XX, four seats are reserved for participants using wheelchairs, in the seventh (last) row. Hearing loops are available for collection from the Accessibility focal point at the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in the “Accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities” (available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/Accessibility.aspx>)

Background:

Women human rights defenders are subject to the same types of risks as any human rights defender, but as women, they are at risk of being targeted or exposed to gender-specific threats and violence. Because their work often challenges gender roles in the society, this can lead to attacks by the public, authorities and community or faith-based leaders and groups, including against their relatives. These attacks are meant to harm their reputation or delegitimize their work, undermining their ability to exercise their right to public participation and to live free from violence.

With the rise of new technologies and the internet, this violence tends to be exacerbated. While the increased use of information and communication technology (ICT), including social media tools and mobile information, contributes to women and girls’ fuller enjoyment of their human rights, it also brings new challenges to overcome violence against women, including women human rights defenders. Internet-related violence takes many forms; it is often of a sexualized nature and include intimidation, attacks on reputation, threats of rape, non-consensual dissemination of intimate data and images, dissemination of rape recordings, cyber stalking, trolling and sexual harassment. Like any other form of violence, technology related violence against women is often underpinned by multiple and intersecting forms of bias and discrimination, including based on age, class, race, poverty, migratory status, gender identity and or sexual orientation. Often, in the absence of adequate responses to these attacks, women and girls may be reluctant to report and may resort to intentionally self-censoring themselves and reducing, or even abandoning the online space – particularly in situations of organized or systematic attacks.

An unsafe digital space infringes on the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and freedoms, including the right to privacy or respect for private life and to freedom of expression. Efforts to address violence against women human rights defenders should promote and uphold these and other human rights of women and girls and in no way undermine them.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has interpreted the provisions of the Convention to cover acts of discrimination and violence that occur online. As such, the CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women ascertains that the Convention is fully applicable to technology-mediated environments, such as the Internet and digital spaces, as settings where contemporary forms of violence against women and girls frequently occur in their redefined form. Regional and national frameworks have also increasingly addressed violence through explicit recognition of the right of women to be free from violence both offline and online. Furthermore, ensuring a free and safe access to the digital space and internet to women human rights defenders is a key enabler for development, human rights and gender equality, including for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goals 5 and 16.

The growing prevalence of online violence against women requires combined efforts to prevent, contain the phenomenon and to fight impunity. Hence, the necessity to identify the specific challenges this group of defenders face online, to strengthen prevention and protection mechanisms, at national, regional and international levels.

Background documents and resolutions:

- [Human Rights Council resolution 6/30](#) (14 December 2007) on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system
- [Human Rights Council resolution 23/25](#) (14 June 2013) on accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: preventing and responding to rape and other forms of sexual violence
- [Human Rights Council resolution 26/15](#) (26 June 2014) on accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: violence against women as a barrier to women's political and economic empowerment
- [Human Rights Council resolution 31/32](#) (24 March 2016) on protecting human rights defenders, whether individuals, groups or organs of society, addressing economic, social and cultural rights
- [Human Rights Council resolution 32/13](#) (1 July 2016) on the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet
- [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#), General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 (26 July 2017)