

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

Expert Group Meeting Report & Recommendations

8-9 March 2018 | New York, NY



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
SPECIAL PROCEDURES

SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS, INDEPENDENT EXPERTS & WORKING GROUPS

Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence
against women, its causes and consequences



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HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

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In collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and
National Democratic Institute for International Affairs.

ABOUT THE MEETING

UN Women, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (Special Rapporteur or SRVAW), in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), co-organized an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) on March 8 and 9, 2018 in New York.

More than 40 experts attended the meeting, including: Members of Parliament (MPs) and local government; academics; gender equality advocates; and representatives of regional human and women's rights monitoring mechanisms, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), UN agencies and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

Convened at a time when gender-based violence (GBV) against women (GBVAW) was in the global spotlight, the EGM provided the space for a diverse, specialized and influential group of experts to identify institutional, advocacy and legal means to enable women to fully realize their political rights, and end impunity for those who seek to stifle or suppress them.

This report provides a précis of the EGM discussions. It contains key points and priority actions to inform partners' interventions, particularly the Special Rapporteur's forthcoming thematic report on VAWP to the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly.

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ABBREVIATIONS

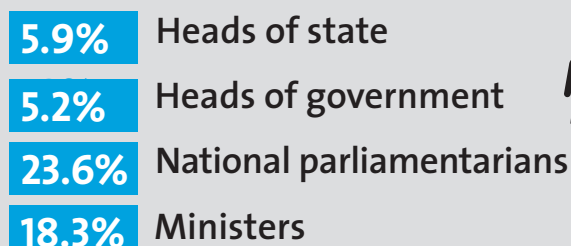
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|--------------|--|
| EGM | Expert Group Meeting |
| EMB | Electoral Management Bodies |
| EVAW | Ending Violence Against Women |
| GBV | Gender-Based Violence |
| GBVAW | Gender-Based Violence Against Women |
| SRVAW | UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| VAW | Violence Against Women |
| VAWE | Violence Against Women in Elections |
| VAWP | Violence Against Women in Politics |

OPENING SESSION

Ms. Purna Sen, Director of Policy, UN Women, highlighted that GBVAW is receiving unprecedented attention with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Target 5.2 to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, the [#MeToo](#) movement, and a renewed focus on sexual abuse and exploitation. Public awareness on VAWP, however, has been sporadic and belated.

for this, VAWP is the most tragic. Social media, she added, appears to be an especially frightening space for women in politics. Drawing attention to the case of [Hon. Diane Abbott](#), a United Kingdom MP who alone received almost half of all the abusive Tweets sent to female MPs in the run-up to the 2017 general election,¹ she highlighted the potentially disproportionate experience of VAWP for women of color.

WOMEN IN POLITICS TODAY



Sources: women heads of state and government data (UN Women 2018); women in national parliaments, (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2018); women in ministerial positions (UN Women and Inter-Parliamentary Union 2017).

Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, OHCHR, expressed OHCHR's support for the SRVAW, who has decided to make VAWP a focus issue within her broader mandate. He named VAWP as a clear deterrent to women's political participation – be it voting, running for or remaining in elected office – and noted that available data and anecdotal evidence indicate a global backlash designed to roll back the progress made on women's rights.

He highlighted several illustrative cases: in the United States, among the revelations of the [#MeToo](#) movement has been the prevalence of sexual harassment experienced by women and perpetrated by men at all levels and in [all branches of government](#); in Honduras, where Mr. Gilmour met last year with the family of murdered human rights activist [Berta Cáceres](#); and

Underscoring that VAWP is a human rights violation and a violation of women's political rights, Ms. Sen

“The range of experiences of political life have been the stories of abuse, violence and the fear of violence that have impeded women's participation and full contribution to political life. Those are, of course, rights. And violence against women in politics is a violation of those rights. We won't have true democracy anywhere without the safe, full and equal participation of women.”

— Ms. Purna Sen, Director of Policy, UN Women

held that women must be able to exercise those rights and bring their full value and contribution to public life “wherein major decisions are made, and major policies are shaped that impact whole societies.” She recalled that targets set by Member States to achieve gender balance in political leadership are unmet, and women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making. Among the many reasons

in the United Kingdom, where in 2016 the world witnessed the assassination of MP [Jo Cox](#), and where MP [Jess Phillips](#) received more than 600 rape threats on Twitter in a single night after joining a campaign to combat online bullying. He added that VAWP is not limited to high-profile women leaders but affects any woman who expresses opinions publicly.

¹ According to an Amnesty International [study](#) that also revealed Black and Asian women MPs received 35 per cent more abusive Tweets than their White colleagues (Medium 2017).

“On the Internet, it seems that almost any woman who dares express a political opinion exposes herself to a barrage of vitriol and threats. These online attacks can have grave offline consequences, from psychological and emotional harm to offline stalking and physical attacks.”

—Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-
General for Human Rights, OHCHR

He also recalled that women face violence and intimidation not just from strangers, but from their own families and communities. When women experience violence that keeps them from contributing to society, “we all suffer that loss.” It is therefore neither productive nor accurate to view this as a “women’s issue,” he argued, adding that men must act to support women family members, colleagues, friends and leaders in the struggle against VAWP. This is not only a matter

face discrimination: poor women, women from racial and ethnic minority groups, LGBTI women, and women from geographically isolated communities. VAWP is a human rights violation that compounds exponentially, she asserted: not only is it a violation of women’s human and political rights, it also diminishes policy outcomes by limiting the range of perspectives and ideas available in decision-making and deters other women and girls from participating in politics.

“Violence against women in politics is deeply damaging not only to women, but to all of us. Every vote that is not cast, every voice that is not heard, takes us farther from realizing our full potential as local and national polities and as a global community.”

—Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, OHCHR

of ensuring women’s basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, but also of recognizing that political systems benefit from the inclusion of women’s ideas and perspectives.

Dr. Dubravka Šimonović, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, decided to make VAWP an important element of her thematic work and the subject of her forthcoming report to the General Assembly, because, she said, “until now, we have insufficiently focused on violence against women by not including the political sphere.” She stressed that women who experience this violence are not only targeted because of their political activism, but also because they are *women* who are politically active. Risks of violence are heightened for those from marginalized communities who already

Highlighting the especially scant data available on VAWP, the Special Rapporteur explained how her work on VAWP is closely tied to other thematic priorities of her mandate, including: the use of data on VAW as a prevention tool; establishing a “femicide watch” to track gender-related killings of women; understanding and seeking solutions to end online VAW; and prioritizing cooperation between international and regional independent monitoring mechanisms for women’s human rights. She emphasized that VAWP is one area where international and regional cooperation would be key, adding that “[we] need to come together in implementing human rights instruments and supporting women in politics to push back against constant violent attacks.” She noted that this EGM marks the start of a long-lasting partnership.

“*Make no mistake: this is gender-based violence, and its goal is stopping not just the individuals specifically targeted, but all women from expressing their political voice and agency.*”

—Dr. Dubravka Šimonović,
Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

OPENING SESSION

KEY POINTS:

- Violence against women in politics is GBV and a human rights violation that impacts on the whole society.
- VAWP is a deterrent to women's political participation and political rights and processes, and policy outcomes suffer from the underrepresentation of women decision-makers.
- Women of color appear to be disproportionately affected, and risks are likely higher for women of marginalized communities.
- While international attention is overdue, there is high-level international support and commitment to prioritize, prevent and end VAWP, including through the independent mandate of the UN SRVAW.
- The EGM marks the start of a long-lasting partnership between UN agencies and international organizations, global and regional women's rights independent monitoring mechanisms, academia and CSOs.

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