

States must combat domestic violence in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns – UN rights expert

GENEVA (27 March 2020) – Restrictive measures adopted worldwide to fight COVID-19 intensify the risk of domestic violence; Governments must uphold the human rights of women and children and come up with urgent measures to the victims of such violence, a UN human rights expert said today.

"It is very likely that rates of widespread domestic violence will increase, as already suggested by initial police and hotline reports. For too many women and children, home can be a place of fear and abuse. That situation worsens considerably in cases of isolation such as the lockdowns imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic," the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Dubravka Simonovic, warned.

"All States should make significant efforts to address the COVID -19 threat, but they should not leave behind women and children victims of domestic violence, as this could lead to an increase of domestic violence including intimate partner femicides," she said

"The risk is aggravated in a time when there are no or fewer shelters and help services available for victims; when it is difficult to access those that are still open; and when there is less community support; fewer police interventions and less access to justice as many courts are closed."

The UN expert noted that, for many women, the emergency measures needed to fight COVID-19 have increased their burden regarding domestic work and the care of children, elderly relatives and sick family members. "To make matters worse, restrictions of movement, financial constraints and generalized uncertainty embolden perpetrators and provide them with additional power and control."

Simonovic expressed particular concerns about women at higher risk of domestic violence, such as women with disabilities, undocumented migrant women and victims of trafficking.

The UN expert called on governments not to put the protection of victims on hold and urged them to continue to combat domestic violence in time of COVID-19. Measures to protect victims must remain available or be adopted during the crisis. That includes ensuring access to protection by restraining orders and maintaining safe shelters and help lines for the victims. The police should increase their efforts for rapid action.

"As making phone calls might be dangerous in a context of home confinement, helplines can facilitate access by providing online chats and texting services for victims, States should also come up with new and creative solutions to support them," the expert said.

"Governments must not allow the extraordinary circumstances and restrictive measures against COVID-19 to lead to the violation of women's right to a life free from violence."

Simonovic's statement has been endorsed by **Elizabeth Broderick (Vice Chair)**, **Alda Facio**, **Ms. Ivana Radačić**, **Meskerem Geset Techane (Chair)**, **Melissa Upreti**, [Working Group on discrimination against women and girls](#); **Maud de Boer-Buquicchio**, [Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children](#); **Catalina Devandas Aguilar**, [Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities](#); **Agnes Callamard**, [Special Rapporteur on](#)

[extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#): and **Maria Grazia Giammarinaro**, [Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children](#).

ENDS

The Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Working Groups are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

For further information and **media requests**, please contact: Renata Preturlan (+41 22 928 92 54 / rpreturlan@ohchr.org), or write to vaw@ohchr.org

For media inquiries related to other UN independent experts, please contact: Xabier Celaya, (+ 41 22 917 9445 / xcelaya@ohchr.org)

Follow news related to the UN's independent human rights experts on Twitter [@UN_SPExperts](#).

Concerned about the world we live in?

Then STAND UP for someone's rights today.

#Standup4humanrights

and visit the web page at <http://www.standup4humanrights.org>