

UNGA75 | Vital work of women in promoting and protecting human rights must be recognised and safeguarded

21.10.2020

Yesterday, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association virtually presented his report to the Third Committee. He emphasised the essential role played by women and girls in defending human rights globally, as well as the numerous barriers faced due to gender-based discriminations and violence.



The Special Rapporteur opened by expressing concern for systematic repression of peaceful protests by States, citing diverse threats on civil society including restrictive laws, digital attacks, and criminalisation of human rights defence. His report highlighted the courage of women's organisations and defenders, whose contribution remains underestimated, underfunded and discredited.

'Women human rights defenders face patterns of State repression, as well as obstacles and reprisals from within communities and families, in public space, at work, or on the digital sphere. In addition to the risks of threats, attacks and violence faced by all defenders, women human rights defenders are exposed to specific risks, driven by deep-rooted discrimination against women and stereotypes related to gender and sexuality,' said ISHR's Tess McEvoy.

Women-led movements are integral to development and peace. The Special Rapporteur called on States to 'take specific measures which will ensure that women's movements are recognized, that we act to eliminate gender discrimination, and to ensure that women's organisations are properly funded.'



Many States welcomed the report and reiterated the Special Rapporteur concerns. Several States echoed on the need to address gender-based violence and threats against women human rights defenders, both online and offline. Switzerland expressed particular concern regarding reports of sexual violence against women during demonstrations and consequent arrests, while the EU echoed calls for States to cease using Covid-19 as ruse to limit political participation. The Russian Federation, on the other hand, questioned the gender-oriented theme of the report and accused foreign States of interference in national matters by funding protesters.

Both the EU and the US raised concerns over restrictions on the right to freedom of association in specific countries. The EU noted reports of women's movements in Belarus being limited, while the US raised concerns over restrictions in Belarus, Nicaragua, Cambodia and China. In response, China refuted these accusations and criticised systematic racial discrimination and police brutality in the US.

In his concluding remarks, the Special Rapporteur appealed to States to cease imposing restrictions on demonstrators and welcome open dialogue. He also called on those States with pending country visit invitations to respond.

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