



Permanent Mission of Albania to
the United Nations

“We Have Your Back” Breaking the cycle from online harassment to threats to violence against women and girl leaders

Subject: While the internet and digital spaces providing direct communication networks for a wide audience bring potential benefits and empowerment, women and girls across the world are also facing violence, including harassment and threats, facilitated by these new technologies. This is particularly critical for younger generations of women and girls who extensively use these new technologies, which affect all aspects of their lives. And nowhere is this misogynistic, sexualized and gendered online violence more damaging to human rights and democracy than when it is perpetrated against “women and girl leaders who challenge and may change the patriarchal structures, who uphold gender parity and equality, and who aim to ensure gender issues are integrated into nations’ development”.¹ The cycle of online abuse against women and girl leaders intends to and/or has the effect of silencing them in social media and other online and offline public spaces, and ultimately forcing them out of politics or public life. Online violence is a direct attack on the rights of women and girls to participate in public life with the aim of silencing and limiting the visibility of women’s and girls’ leadership. It hinders their power as role models and barrier breakers for others. Indirectly, it can also have significant detrimental consequences on the passage of laws and the implementation of policies that provide for equal rights, health, safety, education and access to opportunities.

It is therefore a matter of urgency to address how States, information and communication technology (ICT) companies, and other stakeholders can urgently eradicate online violence against women and girl leaders and create an enabling environment for achieving gender equality through the use of ICT.

Background: Women and girl leaders – such as women in politics, women human rights defenders, bloggers, journalists, activists, etc. – are particularly targeted by ICT-facilitated violence and suffer disproportionately serious consequences as a result. As the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women has emphasized, online violence against women and girl leaders “not only violates a woman’s right to live free from violence and to participate online but also undermines democratic exercise and good governance, and as such creates a democratic deficit”.²

IPU studies on violence against women in parliaments³ show that social media is the main channel for threats; with 41.8 per cent of women MPs interviewed globally and 58.2 per cent in Europe saying they had been the target of abusive, sexual or violent content and behaviour on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). One interviewee described how she was harassed online: “I got an anonymous message saying, ‘We’re going to kill you. First, we’re going to beat up your children. Then you will be raped, killed. Your husband and your children, we’ll get you all. You can hire bodyguards, but we know where you live. We’ll get you all.’”

Technological features also make it possible for pernicious content to be spread extremely rapidly (“viral”), reproduced and remain visible. “Technology has transformed many forms of gender-based violence into something that can be perpetrated across distance, without physical contact and beyond borders through the use of anonymous profiles to amplify the harm to victims.”⁴ This serves as a barrier to women entering or staying in the public and political arena and it undermines their work as public or elected officials. A recent example includes a decision by 18 women parliamentarians from the United Kingdom not to run for re-election. “I am exhausted by the invasion into my privacy and the nastiness and intimidation that has become commonplace,” Heidi Allen MP wrote in a detailed letter to her constituents explaining why she would not be on the ballot. “Nobody in any job should have to put up with threats, aggressive emails, being shouted at in the street, sworn at on social media, nor have to install panic alarms at home.”⁵



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Purpose: Organize a CSW65 side event on the impact of online violence, including harassment and threats against women and girl leaders, relating it to the Beijing Platform for Action. Panellists will discuss available research on this topic, possible preventive actions and good practices by different stakeholders – including legal, grassroots, professional and academic perspectives – for tackling online violence against women and girl leaders.

As time in the side event is limited, co-sponsors are invited to provide a short-written account of their efforts in combatting online violence against women and girl leaders, which will be included in the programme and published with promotional materials.

Date: Wednesday, 24 March 2021

Time: 10.30 – 12.00 a.m. ET / 3.30 to 5 p.m. CET

Registration: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe9XsFVczrKLMIOzsilf1TppDwtVXSG9Qfqy0eH GphL5LMA/viewform?usp=sf_link

Platform: Interprefy (link to be provided upon completion of the registration form)

Languages: English, French, Spanish and Arabic

Moderator: Ms. Claire Doole, Anchorwoman and former BBC reporter

Panelists:

- Ms. Tone Wilhelmsen Trøen – President of the Norwegian Parliament
- Ms. Lucina Di Meo - Expert, advocate and writer on women's leadership and gendered disinformation
- Ms. Chris Sagona - American Journalist and League of Women Voters of the United States, UN Observer
- Ms. Julie Inman Grant - Australian eSafety Commissioner
- Ms. Besiana Kadare - Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Albania to the UN
- Dr. Hedy Fry - Member of the Canadian Parliament
- Ms. Susan Kihika - Kenyan Senator and President of the IPU Bureau of Women Parliamentarians

¹ Remarks by Ms. Tesfamariamhol (Eritrea) on the occasion of the Third Committee debate, 7 and 8 October 2019.

² Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1641160/files/A_HRC_38_47-EN.pdf, July 2018.

³ IPU, Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians, 2016, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>; IPU-PACE, Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe, 2018, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective, see note 2 above.

⁵ New York Times (1 November 2019) "Threats and Abuse Prompt Female Lawmakers to leave U.K. Parliament", Megan Specia

