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Forum of Women Parliamentarians
Item 5

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Contributing to the work of the 143rd IPU Assembly from a gender perspective

Friday, 26 November 2021
11.30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

I. Arrangements for the debate

Participants will be invited to discuss the draft resolution entitled *Legislation worldwide to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse* that is on the agenda of the 143rd Assembly (Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights). Participants will discuss the draft resolution from a gender perspective and issue recommendations on amendments to be submitted by the Forum of Women Parliamentarians to the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights.

For this purpose, they will work in two groups, each covering one topic as follows:

Group 1 – Gender-responsive and survivor-centred legislation to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse	<i>Hall Madrid, 1st floor, Palacio Municipal (IFEMA)</i>
Group 2 – Age and gender-sensitive strategies to empower and educate children to protect themselves and report online sexual exploitation	<i>Hall Roma, 2nd floor, Palacio Municipal (IFEMA)</i>

After a short presentation on the draft resolution, the Forum will split into the discussion groups. On the recommendation of its Bureau, the Forum will designate a chair and a rapporteur for each group. The rapporteurs will submit the groups' recommendations to the Forum of Women Parliamentarians at the following sitting.

II. Focus of the debate

The draft resolution focuses on the growing phenomenon of online child sexual exploitation, which is further exacerbated by isolation and increased Internet use during COVID-19. The online sexual exploitation of children is a grave violation of human rights. The types of online child sexual exploitation include online grooming, child sexual abuse and exploitation material, and the live streaming of child sexual abuse¹. Oftentimes, these types of exploitation have a strong gender component. The issue requires the urgent involvement of all—at national and international levels, parliaments, governments, ICT companies but also parents and teachers—to ensure the accountability for the physical and psychological protection of children from this crime. In this vein, the draft resolution aims to provide guidance to parliaments on specific actions they may take in terms of

#IPU143

¹ UNODC (2020). Online child sexual exploitation and abuse. <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/cybercrime/module-12/key-issues/online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse.html>

legislation, budget allocation, accountability, prevention and advocacy to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Group 1 – Gender-responsive and survivor-centred legislation to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse

Some forms of online child sexual exploitation may not be considered as crimes in national legislation. There is an urgent need for Parliaments to bring national laws on this matter in line with the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. In September 2019, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted new guidelines to combat child sexual exploitation and the sale of children in the digital age² that can be looked to for guidance.

Parliaments must work on legislation and policies that prioritize children's rights, voices and security when they alert and report online sexual exploitation. They should also ensure capacity building of and cooperation among all those involved in eliminating online and offline child sexual exploitation and abuse, and on campaigns, at all levels, addressing these crimes and Internet safety. This provides an immense opportunity to fill gender gaps and put girls' and boys' rights a priority, through a gender-responsive and survivor-centered legislation. Moreover, parliaments can advance regulatory frameworks of online platforms and ICT companies that ensure accountability and provide reporting pathways to protect children against online sexual abuse, and explore how law enforcement can use technology to apprehend the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation.

- *How can parliaments create legislation and policies to combat online sexual exploitation and abuse that put girls' and boys' rights front and centre?*
- *What are the existing good practices that ensure legislation adequately provide protection and respond to the specific needs of girls and boys survivors of online child sexual exploitation?*
- *How to ensure that law-enforcement mechanisms to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse are child-sensitive, gender-sensitive and survivor-centred?*
- *What are the existing good practices of regulatory frameworks of online platforms and ICT companies that ensure accountability and provide reporting pathways to protect children against online sexual abuse?*

Group 2 – Age and gender-sensitive strategies to empower and educate children to protect themselves and report online sexual exploitation

Investing in the prevention and education of children, including through sex education and ICT awareness in school, is an important strategy in order to empower children with the resources to understand their rights, protect themselves, report online sexual exploitation, and ask for help. Specific support services for victims of online child sexual exploitation must be provided that take into account the specific needs and sensitivities of girls and boys based on their age and gender. Such educational interventions need to be carefully considered, in order not to present children as potential victims, but empower them to become aware and speak up in situations of abuse. Strategies that see children as active agents of change is crucial to the success of combatting exploitation. Children's

² UNCHR (2019). UN Committee launches guidelines on combating child sexual exploitation and the sale of children in the digital age. www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25058

empowerment must be a central component proposed in addressing online child sexual exploitation.

Prioritizing the continued education of children is especially important in the context of COVID-19's economic crisis and the closing of schools. As children are increasingly staying at home, their risk of online sexual exploitation increases. Thus parliaments must prioritize children's continued education and safe schooling as a strong measure to counter online child sexual exploitation.

- *How can preventive measures on online child sexual exploitation and abuse, such as the education of children, be age and gender-sensitive?*
- *What are the ways in which parliaments and educational institutions can take into account the different needs of girls and boys, including in sex education and ICT awareness at school?*
- *What are the existing good practices to educate children to understand their rights, protect themselves and report online sexual exploitation?*
- *How can children be empowered through combatting online child sexual exploitation?*