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Forum of Women Parliamentarians
Item 3

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26 February 2024

Contribution to the work of the 148th Assembly from a gender perspective

Saturday, 23 March 2024, 11:30–13:00
Plenary A (level 0)

I. Arrangements for the debate

The Forum of Women Parliamentarians will discuss one of the draft resolutions on the agenda of the 148th Assembly, *Addressing the social and humanitarian impact of autonomous weapon systems and artificial intelligence* (Standing Committee on Peace and International Security). Participants will discuss the draft resolution from a gender perspective and issue recommendations on gender-related amendments to be submitted by the Forum of Women Parliamentarians to the Standing Committee.

After a short presentation on the draft resolution, the Forum will debate it in plenary. On the recommendation of its Bureau, the Forum will designate a rapporteur, who will present recommendations from the debate to the Forum at its afternoon sitting.

II. Focus of the debate

The debate will focus on the main gender aspects of the draft resolution.

Armed conflict exacerbates existing inequalities between men and women, and reinforces gender roles. The use of technologies for military purposes, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS), raises a number of questions from a gender perspective.

AI is not neutral. Gender norms and biases can be internalized and reinforced in machine learning throughout its life cycle, including through data collection, the training of algorithmic models, their evaluation and use¹. Studies have shown that AI-based voice and facial recognition and automated decision-making algorithms have already introduced and amplified gender biases in their systems, all of which currently recognize men at higher rates than women. As military applications of AI continue to develop with LAWS, drones, target identification systems, and more, such applications that perpetuate gender biases or reinforce gender inequalities not only risk serious targeting errors, but also undermine human rights and roll back progress on UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on peace and security.

Moreover, women are negatively affected by the exclusion and inherent discrimination they face in the military/security and technology sectors.² The participation of women in armed forces around the world in non-administrative, combat and leadership roles is very low. NATO data shows that the proportion of women in the military personnel of member states ranges from 0.3% to 20%.³ This situation is amplified in armed conflicts by a traditional view of gender norms, relegating women to the status of victims and intrinsically vulnerable people, and placing men at the centre as combatants, whether aggressors or protectors. In an extremely masculinized military environment, women who join the army tend to be dismissed and seen as anomalies or as supposedly inferior.⁴ The technological sphere is also very male-dominated, with 92% of software developers being men, according to recent studies.⁵ The almost total

¹ Chandler, Katherine, *Does Military AI Have Gender? Understanding bias and promoting ethical approaches in military applications of AI*, UNIDIR, Geneva, 2021.

² Shimona Mohan, "Filling the Blanks: Putting Gender into Military A.I.," Observer Research Foundation Issue Brief No. 655, August 2023.

³ Katharina Buchholz, "Military Women Remain in the Minority," *Statista*, September 23, 2021.

⁴ Ray Acheson, "Abolishing militarised masculinities," *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)*, July 2022.

⁵ Lionel Sujay Vailshery, "Software developer gender distribution worldwide as of 2022," *Statista*, March 2, 2023.

absence of women and the lack of gender mainstreaming in both the security and tech sectors make it very difficult to ensure that gender considerations are taken into account in the development and deployment of military AI, and the policy processes around it.

In worst-case scenarios, the development and use of autonomous weapons could allow governments, non-State armed groups or others to program a machine to target people based on their sex or gender, potentially leading to gender-based violence committed by killer robots without human control.⁶ Moreover, when autonomous weapons are programmed to target and kill people who are gendered, racialized or otherwise categorized, the result is a flagrant violation of human rights and human dignity and the validation of a system that perpetuates an increasing abstraction of violence and a devaluation of human life.

Faced with the danger of the dehumanized use of war machines and the perpetuation of male-dominated structures of military violence, parliamentarians can take a number of multidimensional actions. These include adopting national legislation to regulate military AI systems and LAWS, ensuring that these systems take gender considerations into account, and prohibiting the development of autonomous weapons systems that would run counter to the safeguarding of human rights and dignity. In parallel, a gender perspective should be applied to the legal review that States should conduct during the development and use of new means and methods of warfare (in particular, those that use AI), as required in Article 36 of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions (AP I).⁷

In terms of the datasets to be used to train, design and develop AI systems, parliamentarians can ensure that such datasets are representative of the diversity of populations and are gender-balanced, based on sex-disaggregated data. AI systems must then be assessed to ensure that they have not incorporated or amplified gender biases. To do this, all those responsible for assessment (developers, engineers, etc.) must be well-trained, gender-sensitized and equipped with the appropriate technical tools to track down and correct any gender biases. Furthermore, the question of who carries out the assessment is also crucial. Given that both the military and technology sectors are predominantly male spaces, active efforts are needed to correct for and ultimately reverse these realities to promote gender parity in the military and technological sectors.⁸

Lastly, it should also be recommended that these measures related to gender, technology and the military should henceforth be included in States' national action plans for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on the women, peace and security agenda.

The guiding questions for the debate will include the following:

- ***What are the most effective actions parliamentarians can take to ensure that AI, including AI for military purposes, does not perpetuate gender bias, gender inequalities and other forms of discrimination?***
- ***What can parliamentarians do to promote countering of gender bias in AI systems, especially in military AI?***
- ***What measures are urgently needed at the national, regional, and international levels to promote gender parity in the military and technology sectors?***
- ***What concrete commitments from States are needed to ensure a gender and intersectional perspective in national and international discussions on LAWS and military AI strategies, based on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on the women, peace and security agenda? And how can parliamentarians contribute?***

⁶ Ray Acheson, *Autonomous weapons and gender-based violence* (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom with the support of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, 2020): <http://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/aws-and-gbv.pdf>

⁷ Andrea Farrés Jiménez, "Gendering the Legal Review of New Means and Methods of Warfare," *Just Security*, August 23, 2022.

⁸ Shimona Mohan, *ibid.*