

7 July 2020

Oral statement to UN Human Rights Council 44th session (30 June – 21 July 2020)

Item 3: *Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*

This is a statement by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) supported by the Syrian Female Journalists Network (SFJN).¹

We welcome the Special Rapporteur on violence against women's report on combating violence against women journalists.²

With the recent large-scale shift to online work due to COVID-19, it is crucial to address the significant increase in online violence, as the report does.³

While we welcome the section dedicated to "risks and threats faced by women journalists and media workers reporting from war zones," we regret that the Special Rapporteur did not highlight the disproportionate impact of conflict and militarisation on women journalists and measures to address that. For example, emergency evacuation mechanisms must be provided for women journalists as well as other journalists, especially in conflict and war-torn countries, such as Syria. The evacuation can take place in-country or to a neighbouring country that should facilitate visas and provide livelihood services until the journalist's safety is guaranteed.

Madam President, we regret that the recommendations in the report do not fully address the root causes of violence against women journalists such as patriarchy, militarism, conflict, and lack of access to justice, and we encourage the Special Rapporteur to carry out this analysis in future reports.

We urge all States to:

- Adopt clear gender-sensitive definitions to all forms of harassment, such as doxing, sextortion and trolling, and establish policies to combat them;
- Implement victim-centred and gender-sensitive policies and mechanisms to encourage women to report cases of harassment. Such policies should address the root causes, as well as the discernible reasons that discourage women from reporting, such as fear of retaliation, job loss and reputational damage, silencing, defamation, victim-blaming, and weak judicial systems that fail to hold perpetrators accountable;
- Implement emergency response mechanisms to ensure the safe evacuation of women journalists, especially those reporting from conflict zones.

¹ The SFJN is a nonprofit association, established in 2013, seeking to build bridges between media and the Syrian women's movement by enhancing and empowering women journalists to take over leading positions in their institutions, and by activating the role of the media in raising social awareness concerning gender equality and women's issues.

² A/HRC/44/52, 6 May 2020.

³ A/HRC/44/52, paragraph 42 "Emerging forms of online violence against women such as "doxing", "sextortion" and "trolling", as well as the non-consensual distribution of intimate content (or "revenge porn"), are also being used to defame and silence women journalists. Technology has therefore transformed different forms of gender-based violence into something that can be perpetrated across distance, without physical contact and beyond borders, with anonymous profiles to amplify the harm to the victim (see A/HRC/38/47)."