UN Human Rights Council, 53rd session (19 June to 14 July 2023)

Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women. Panel 1: Gender-based violence against women and girls in public and political life

Statement on Women’s participation in public and political life

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Women’s and girls’ right to participation is a fundamental human right. For the realisation of that right, states must ensure the prohibition of both *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination in the enjoyment of the full range of human rights, and the prevention of violence.

The obstacles that women face at an individual level as well as the structural barriers and policies that impede women’s participation must be both addressed. For example, policies of neoliberal austerity which undermine women’s economic and social rights and as a consequence, their ability to exercise their right to participation.

Direct discrimination is a reality in many states where the enjoyment of women’s and girls’ rights, in particular to health and reproductive rights, education, employment, freedom of expression, and movement, is either denied entirely, for example in Afghanistan, or made conditional upon a discriminatory practice being adhered to, as in Iran. These violations are then compounded by the imposition of a wide variety of measures to crush dissent, including arrests, disappearances, the targeting of young women for detention, torture and rape. This is exemplified by the policies of both the Taliban in Afghanistan and the government in Iran.

The tokenistic inclusion of women in political positions, as in the case of Iran, is a pretence that does not address structural discrimination.

The Policy paper on the crime of gender persecution released by the ICC’s Office of the Prosecutor last December elaborates how gender discrimination can, in certain circumstances, reach the level of gender persecution, a crime against humanity. In many states, this level is being reached and the crime institutionalised in governance. In order for this to change, women in all their diversity have to be enabled to participate in governance.