



**GW I UPDATE – 21 July 2021**  
**Human Rights Council 47th session**  
**Special Edition**



*United Nations of Geneva. Photo: Nell YACEF, GWI Intern.*

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## — GWI at the UNHRC —

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After more than a year dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts to shape global development and the implementation of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Global Agenda on Sustainable Development must not be in vain. While this 47th session was held under the auspices of remoteness, the events were no less captivating and the 10 usual items have been duly processed, with no less than 32 ID spread out over this 22-day session. This Special Edition of the GWI Update Newsletter highlights some of the events and final resolutions which support GWI's advocacy work to advance the status of women and girls through the safe access to quality, lifelong education, and learning.

This Special Edition Update is produced by GWI interns, Nell Yacef and Julie Odden, who participate on behalf of GWI in the Human Rights Council (HRC).

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## — High-level Panel Discussion on the Multisectoral Prevention of and Response to FGM —

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, introduced this panel by recording that **FGM affects women and girls in around 90 countries** according to a recent study. The pandemic's backlash on secondary schools has deepened the scourge of FGM. Furthermore, she highlighted how "girls and women must have access to information, education, health care and social justice."

She highlighted how a **multi stakeholder approach is necessary to combat it**, within countries but also internationally. For instance, the 2019 Regional Inter-Ministerial Declaration and Action Plan between Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda aim to tackle transnational and cross border FGM in East Africa. To eradicate FGM by 2030, Burkina Faso's president appealed all the actors to "comply with the requirements of resolution 44/16 by mobilising financial resources and allocating them to the prevention and elimination of female genital mutilation". The panelists then reaffirmed the need to accelerate efforts to combat this severe assault on women's and girls' bodies, and that there was progress, albeit uneven. In the following discussion, the speakers highlighted, inter alia, to **include the fight against this harmful and deadly practice in the pandemic's response plans**.

As commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.3 to Eliminate all harmful practices such as FGM, GWI recently published [Harmful Practices](#) as a guide to eliminate child marriage.

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## — ID with the SR on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health —

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The SR, Madame Tlaleng Mofokeng, who took up functions amidst the pandemic, presented her [report](#) on the right to health in Fiji and a report presenting her vision and objectives. One of her priorities is to analyse this right through the lens of intersectionality. Thus, she addressed how **multiple oppressions have an impact on the right to health**. In response, she will adopt a "substantive equality approach". The SR identified priority themes for her tenure: sexuality,

gender-based violence, femicide, reproductive health rights, and health equity. Fiji responded by welcoming the SR's initiatives and explaining the reforms undertaken and their ambitions such as ensuring the progressive realisation of the right to health for all people in Fiji. They recognised the **impact of COVID-19 in exacerbating existing inequalities** and stated they took steps to address it. The International Development Law Organisation, one of the Observers, underscored the centrality of the rule of law to realize the right to health, especially during COVID-19: "Every social determinant of health has a corresponding legal dimension".

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## — ID with the SR on the right to education —

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The SR on the right to education, Mrs. Koumba Boly Barry, recalled the universal right to quality and inclusive education (SDG 4). In her [report](#) she defined the **right to education as a cultural right**. Education is key because it is a chance to access an infinite amount of knowledge shared by all. The SR identified priorities such as the crucial need to adapt the actors in education systems to the cultural diversity of the learners. A large number of countries answered her call, explaining they are **promoting an intercultural education**, which she commends. Another priority is **the right to an interdisciplinary education**, disciplines and knowledge must be able to intersect. The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights encouraged the SR to collaborate with UNESCO and the Global Partnership for Education, to technically support countries in the development of an inclusive education.

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## — ID with the WG on discrimination against women and girls —

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The Chairperson-Rapporteur of the WG on discrimination against women and girls, Melissa Upreti, presented her [thematic report](#) on women's and girl's sexual and reproductive health rights in crisis. A focus was made on Romania, the country visited. Upreti identified the importance of crisis management and how a shift in crisis response was needed. It needs to be **gender-responsive, intersectional as well as intergenerational**. Even though sexual and reproductive health rights are established under international law, estimated **810 maternal deaths occur every day and every 16 seconds there is a stillbirth**. This situation is worsened in times of crisis and by different factors such as discriminatory laws, States' failures to prioritize these rights. As she recognized that certain crises cannot be prevented, she called on States to be better prepared. She invited them to **push back against conservative and anti-human rights ideologies**.

Regarding Romania, Upreti acknowledged progress to establish a legal framework promoting women and girls. However, several problems persist, and the country needs to address, the racial discrimination women are facing to access health care for instance. Romania thanked the WG for their report as it represents a valuable resource for the authorities in their effort to reach gender equality.

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## — ID with the SR on Violence against Women —

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Dubravka Šimonović, SR on violence against women for six years, said her [thematic report](#) was on rape, "a grave, systematic and widespread human rights violation, a crime and a manifestation of

gender-based violence against women and girls, both in peacetime and during conflict”, and stressed **State’s responsibility** to prevent it. Her report focused on the current national laws and international standards on rape, and provides a “Framework for Model Legislation on Rape”, which should serve as an uniformization legislation. She added, inter-alia, that the **notion of consent should be included in all criminal legislations on rape**, and that countries should further strengthen criminalisation regarding marital rape, but also work on the age of sexual consent and on the question of prescription.

Countries reaffirmed, inter alia, the importance of the Istanbul Convention, but also how they individually act in favour of the criminalisation of rape in their own countries. Some speakers said that transgender women faced higher risk, as well as women in poverty situations, indigenous women and other **forms of intersectional identities and situations**. It was reaffirmed that toxic masculinities need to be counter and the culture of rape needs to be disseminated, through education, to destroy patriarchal stereotypes. Also, because some countries made objections on the use of the notion of “consent” in their legal texts, the SR finally recalled that it was already included in [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\) General Comment No. 35](#).

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## — Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women —

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### **Violence against women and girls with disabilities (first panel)**

Nada Al-Nashif, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, said estimates indicated that there were **700 million women and girls with disabilities** in the world today, which represents about one in five women. However, **they remain largely invisible and isolated**, not participating in decisions directly concerning them. The Deputy High Commissioner concluded that it increases the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) against these women and girls. This risk was exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdowns, marginalising them even more. Nada Al-Nashif ended her statement by recalling that SDG 5, on gender equality, cannot be achieved without women and girls with disabilities, thus highlighting the **need for comprehensive and inclusive policies and programmes**.

One of the panelists, the Indonesian Association of Women with Disabilities (HWDI), represented by Chairperson, Maulani Rotinsulu, expressed concern about the situation of women and girls with disabilities. Rotinsulu explained that the most vulnerable group to GBV is women with autism spectrum and those with hearing, vision, psychological, or intellectual disorders. HWDI, collaborating with the Indonesian Service Providers Forum, collected data on GBV in Indonesia. They revealed several issues on the case-handling mechanism during COVID-19. From this survey, HWDI recommended the improvement of data collection systems related to GBV cases, the macro design of referral systems or inclusive programmes and the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities.

### **Gender-equal socioeconomic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (second panel)**

**Women are the most impacted by COVID-19 as pre-existing gaps were deepened** and are not equally involved in the decision-making in the response to COVID-19. Her Excellency Ms. Mónica Zalaquett Said, Minister for Women and Gender Equity of Chile, showed that **women represented only 24% of those mandated to respond to the pandemic**. Adding to that, COVID-19 led to an important loss of jobs, especially for women. Before the crisis, Chile had reached a historical peak, 53,3% of women in the labour market but in June 2020 already, the pandemic set them back to 41,2%. It means that almost 900 000 women dropped out of the labour force. She pointed out that the situation of Chile is no different from the other countries. Faced with this dramatic situation, the

Government of Chile is committed to a gender-responsive approach to economic reactivation. The COVID Women’s Council was thus created, focusing on violence, health, economic recovery and care. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, recommended prioritizing recovery efforts protecting and advancing economic security of women. She urged governments to **protect civic space and the participation of women and girls**.

One of the panelists, Mr. Mohammad Naciri, UN Women Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific highlighted the importance of protecting women care workers. They need to be recognized as essential workers. Another important issue raised by Mr. Mohammad Naciri is the need to expand social protection for care-givers. He explained that it means cash transfers for low-income women and unemployed informal workers.

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## — Resolutions and Decisions —

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On 14 July 2021, the HRC concluded its forty-seventh regular session with the adoption of 25 resolutions and two decisions.

Besides the UPR outcomes adoptions (see write up below), the Council filled seven vacancies of Special Procedure mandate holders, among which are Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights of persons with albinism, Ms. Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond (Zambia); and Reem Alsalem (Jordan) as the SR on violence against women, its causes and consequences. With regard to the position of WG of Experts on People of African Descent, a member from Asia-Pacific States, the appointment went to Mr. Sushil Raj (India).

Importantly, under Agenda Item three on the *Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including the Right to Development*, the Council adopted 25 resolutions including:

- Resolution ([A/HRC/47/L.1](#)) on “**civil society space: COVID-19: the road to recovery and the essential role of civil society**”, which requests the High Commissioner to prepare a report that examines, with a multi stakeholder point of view, the challenges and practices of the civil society.
- Resolution ([A/HRC/47/L.2](#)) on “**menstrual hygiene management, human rights and gender equality**” in which the Council decides to establish a panel discussion, jointly with the relevant stakeholders, at the 50 HRC session to address the issue of menstrual hygiene management. It also requires the High Commissioner on Human Rights to prepare a summary of it and present it at the 53rd session.
- Resolution ([A/HRC/47/L.3](#)) on the “**realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl**”, requests the High Commissioner on Human Right, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders, to prepare a report highlighting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl.
- Resolution ([A/HRC/47/L.4/Rev.1](#)) on “**the right to education**”, which urges all States to “strengthen their legal frameworks, to adopt adequate policies and programmes and to allocate sufficient resources, either individually or through international assistance and cooperation, to the full realization of the right to education”<sup>1</sup>.

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- Resolution ([A/HRC/47/L.18/Rev.1](#)) on “**accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities**”, urging States to take measures to address all forms of violence against women and girls, and “ensuring that sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are fully realized, including for victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, by addressing the social and other determinants of health, removing barriers, developing and enforcing policies, good practices and legal frameworks, and strengthening health systems that make quality comprehensive sexual and reproductive health-care services, information and education universally accessible and available and inclusive.”

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## — UPR Outcomes Adopted for Five GWI Affiliates —

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The WG on the UPR, established in accordance with HRC resolution 5/1, held its 37th session from 18 January to 8 February 2021. For this HRC 47th session, the Council adopted UPR outcomes for 13 States, including for five GWI National Federations and Associations: Australia, Austria, Lebanon, Nepal, and Rwanda.

### [Australia](#)

Several countries noted the country’s progress in combating violence and discrimination against women, including with the “National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children” and the aid during the COVID-19 pandemic for women and children. Plus, some highlighted Australia’s measures aiming to increase women’s leadership and workforce participation. Regarding education, it was appreciated the country’s steps to promote inclusive education.

Yet, several countries recommended Australia to pursue its efforts to put an end to discrimination against the most vulnerable, including children, women, persons with disabilities and Indigenous peoples. In the same vein, **it was recommended to further develop measures to combat the disparity between the Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in the education system.**

### [Austria](#)

Several countries commended the country’s measures to improve the representation of women in leadership positions, but also its commitment to enhance gender equality, and to reduce gender-based violence. It was also welcomed the progress made on combatting discrimination against women in education.

**Austria was recommended to combat gendered division of roles within families**, and to further prevent gender-based violence. Several countries reiterated the need to reduce the gender pay gap in the country. Regarding education, it was recommended to **strengthen access for education for all children, in particular for ethnic minorities such as Roma children**. Finally, it was recommended to “enhance its ongoing efforts on human rights education campaigns, especially those on the rights of women, children, the elderly and minorities”.

### [Lebanon](#)

The report recalled that Lebanon is in the middle of a difficult economic and migratory juncture, in addition to the current pandemic crisis. Thus, the country established a **national strategy for the protection of women and children**, which was commended by several countries. Still in the field of women’s rights, “the National Commission for Lebanese Women started implementing the national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). On 21 January 2021, the House of



Representatives approved the law on criminalizing sexual harassment, rehabilitating its victims and ensuring their reintegration into society, and the law amending the law to protect women and all family members from domestic violence. The Commission had urged the authorities to address the consequences of the pandemic and protect women from violence.” Regarding the right to education, the “Back to School Plan 2020–2021” was developed in order to save the educational sector despite all the challenges, while pursuing the “Reaching all children with education” programme, to provide education for displaced Syrians.

Lebanon was recommended, inter alia, to lift its reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as Ratifying its optional Protocol. It was also recommended to criminalize sexual harassment, domestic violence, as well as marital rape. **Several countries also recommended Lebanon to pursue the promotion of gender equality, especially in the field of marriage and divorce, inheritance and transmission of nationality to children.** When it comes to education, it was recommended to enshrine in the constitution the right to education for all, without discrimination, including for children with disability. Moreover, some countries reaffirmed the need to take necessary measures to put an end to child and early forced marriages (CEFM).

### Nepal

**Several countries commended Nepal for the President’s programme for improving the situation of women in terms of the elimination of caste-based and gender-based violence** inter alia, and its measures to increase women’s representation in the public field (women constitute 33% of positions in the Federal Parliament and provincial assemblies).

**Nepal was recommended to “Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that includes a definition of discrimination against women encompassing direct and indirect discrimination and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination”,** which includes harmful and traditional practices, but also to strengthen the protection of the most vulnerable groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities. In terms of education, further ensuring the inclusion for the “underrepresented castes and indigenous peoples, including children with disabilities, at all levels of education, and to ensure the representation of these groups, especially women, in teaching positions”. As well as the recommendation to **further measures to foster gender parity in primary and secondary education**, it was also encouraged to enhance women’s empowerment through “education, awareness-raising, training for skills development and employment”.

### Rwanda

As an outcome, the delegation recognises women’s participation and representation in decision-making positions. In the same vein, **several countries also commended Rwanda’s efforts for gender equality**, which is, besides, ranked 9 according to the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI). When it comes to education, the delegation notes the **increase in the budget allocation for education** and efforts to develop infrastructures, in line with “The Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy” and its implementation plan adopted in 2019.

Thus, Rwanda was recommended inter alia to further strengthen its commitment to ensure gender equality and women’s empowerment, to combat all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic and sexual violence and to **guarantee access for women and girls to sexual and reproductive health** and rights and facilitate their access to comprehensive sexuality education. Moreover, the country was recommended to **pursue its efforts in terms of inclusion in schools**, in particular for persons with disabilities, girls’ secondary education and women’s tertiary education.

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## — Dates and events worth noting —

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30 July	World Day against Trafficking in Persons, Global
9 August	World's Indigenous Peoples, Global
12 August	International Youth Day, Global
8 September	International Literacy Day, Global
14 Sept-2 Oct	Human Rights Council, 48th session, United Nations Office, Geneva
18-20 September	Centenary of the French Association of University Women (AFFDU)
21 September	International Day of Peace, Global
5 October	World Teachers' Day, Global
11 October	International Day of the Girl Child, Global
15 October	International Day of Rural Women, Global
17 October	World Day for Eradication of Poverty, Global
24 October	United Nations Day, Global

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