

Statement of DefendDefenders on the report of the Special Rapporteur on women

Honorable Chairpersons,

Distinguished Commissioners,

Ladies and gentlemen!

Allow me on behalf of AfricanDefenders and DefendDenfers to appreciate the work well done by Hon. Lucy Asuagbor as Special Rapporteur on Women Rights in Africa. We welcome as well the leadership of Hon. Commissioner Zainabu Kayitesi and we are looking forward to working with her.

“The work of defending human rights is already very difficult work and when you add the additional responsibilities that women have, given the patriarchal nature of our societies, it becomes even more difficult.”

During this pandemic, women are facing economic insecurity and poverty-related stress, social isolation issues, disaster and conflict-related unrest, reduced availability of health services, and exposure to exploitative relationships, with the inability of women to temporarily escape abusive partners. The restrictive measures imposed by African States and other movement restrictions have forced many women to remain confined in their homes which has led to an increase in sexual gender-based violence at the domestic level. Furthermore, many women are unable to report these cases of violence against them, and WHRDs are also unable to provide the victims with the assistance they need due to movement restrictions. Globally there has been an increase in domestic violence cases between March and April 2020.

Gender based violence despite numerous guidance and resolutions of this commission has not decreased on the continent and women continue to suffer the consequences.

Honourable Chairperson,

The domestic responsibilities, such as childcare and general household chores often fall on women, especially in Africa. With schools closed across the continent and children at home all the time, it can be more difficult for women to balance these duties with their activism roles. While activism work has largely moved online under

COVID-19 restrictions, many women may struggle to access stable internet connection. Some WHRDs can access the internet, however the women they support especially in rural areas do not have this kind of connectivity creating a divide between groups who can access support during this time. With more online activities, cyber-attacks on women have increased, women are unable to access basic health services and report cases of violence due to lockdowns and restrictions of movement. As a result, WHRDs are unable to document these cases and facilitate women's access to justice, as they cannot lodge complaints and ensure case follow-up.

Honourable chairperson,

The psychological effect of COVID-19 on women has gravely impacted their life, as they are unable to access social networks such as church/mosque groups and other informal women groupings, which provide great support for women. Women working in conflict situations as well as refugee women are experiencing patterns of gross human rights violations and these violations are worsening as there are no one to monitor and report these abuses due to COVID-19 restrictions.

We call on this commission to take necessary measures to ensure that States parties comply with the full implementation of Maputo protocol provision.

I thank you.