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Chair: Mr. Grünwald (Vice-Chair) (Slovakia)

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In the absence of Mr. Marschik (Austria), Mr. Grünwald (Slovakia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 71: Promotion and protection of human rights (continued) (A/78/198)

(a) Implementation of human rights instruments (continued) (A/78/40, A/78/44, A/78/48, A/78/55, A/78/56, A/78/240, A/78/263, A/78/271, A/78/281, A/78/324 and A/78/354)

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(c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives (continued) (A/78/204, A/78/212, A/78/223, A/78/244, A/78/278, A/78/297, A/78/299, A/78/326, A/78/327, A/78/338, A/78/340 and A/78/511)

(d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (continued) (A/78/36)

1. **Ms. Khan** (Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression), introducing her report (see [A/78/288](#)), said that the report she had presented in 2021 had shown that online violence, disinformation and hate speech were major impediments to achieving gender equality. Her current report followed up on that observation by looking more deeply into the issue of gendered disinformation. After two years of extensive consultations, she had found that women, girls and gender nonconforming persons were a major target of disinformation in all regions of the world, yet there was little understanding of the problem and even less effective action.

2. Gendered disinformation was a strategy to silence women and gender nonconforming persons and drive them out of public places and online spaces. It weaponized and reaffirmed gender biases, stereotypes, sexism, misogyny, and social and cultural norms based on patriarchal values, resulting in harm to the individual and to wider society.

3. The more visible the individual, the more likely they were to be targeted. Female politicians, journalists and human rights defenders were therefore particularly at risk. While young women and adolescent girls were frequent targets on social media, the most virulent attacks were reserved for those who belonged to minority or marginalized communities. By exploiting social divides and tension points, such as racism, homophobia and transphobia, gendered disinformation deepened the marginalization of vulnerable groups and increased the risk of violence.

4. Non-State actors, often motivated by extremist ideologies, religious convictions or anti-rights objectives, played a significant role in organizing coordinated online gendered disinformation campaigns, sometimes with the explicit or tacit support of States.

5. The risk of harm from disinformation was increased significantly by the power of online amplification and coordination. Social media platforms were a key vector of gendered disinformation, but some traditional media outlets also legitimized such content, whether deliberately or inadvertently.

6. State responses to gendered disinformation had focused predominantly on laws to prohibit online violence or fake news or regulate social media. Clearly focused and properly implemented legislation had a role to play, but “fake news” laws and social media regulation had done little to address disinformation and more to restrict criticism against the State.

7. She had made a number of recommendations in her report. Strategies to fight gendered disinformation must be grounded firmly in international human rights law. Freedom of opinion and expression was essential for women’s political, social and economic empowerment, the preservation of democracy and the promotion of the transformative changes that gender justice demanded.

8. Because the goal of gendered disinformation was to disempower women, States must invest in their empowerment and agency, not in censorship or paternalistic policies. States needed to reinvigorate their efforts to remove the structural and systemic barriers to gender equality that were the drivers of gendered disinformation.

9. States must urgently close the gender digital divides and data gaps and invest in digital literacy. They had an obligation under international law to fulfil the right to information by proactively providing factual, verifiable data, including on sexual and reproductive health.

10. Social media platforms had taken a “one-size-fits-all” approach that failed to address the distinct nature of gendered disinformation. The companies involved needed to identify and address the specific factors that increased the risks of gendered disinformation in different contexts, and improve their content moderation, complaint procedures and application of community standards.

11. Fighting gendered disinformation was a multi-stakeholder initiative and civil society had a lot to contribute. The negotiations on a global digital compact would be an important opportunity to build consensus on standards and approaches that would make the Internet accessible and safe for all. There must be no trade-off between women’s right to be safe and their right to speak.

12. **Ms. Riveroll Usabiaga** (Mexico) said that her country was committed to changing social dynamics and structures that had prevented the empowerment of women and their ability to exercise their rights, including the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The digital space needed a feminist revolution, since it had been used to spread disinformation and amplify hate speech aimed at intimidating women and delegitimizing their ideas and actions. She asked the Special Rapporteur to share any innovative ideas she might have for cooperation between States and private companies operating in the digital context.

13. **Ms. Landy** (Ireland) said that her country was concerned by the escalation of gendered disinformation, which was part of a pushback against universal human rights. She asked how to support women and gender nonconforming persons in exercising their freedom of expression, while minimizing the chances of self-censorship.

14. **Mr. Nyman** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that the States members of the European Union shared the Special Rapporteur’s concern about the way in which disinformation, misinformation and hate speech rooted in gender stereotypes were used as a form of abuse and violence against women, which often had a severe impact on their human rights. He asked how the international community could shape effective policies to counter the consequences of disinformation and set

common standards in order to uphold the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as well as women’s human rights and access to civic space.

15. **Ms. Schlyter** (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries, said that the worrying increase in cases of harassment, intimidation and violence against persons exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression was unacceptable. She called upon all States to put a stop to such actions, since freedom of opinion and expression applied to everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, belief or political affiliation.

16. **Mr. Košuth** (Slovakia) said that his Government had made media freedom and the safety of journalists an integral part of its foreign policy engagement in response to the murder of Slovakian journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée in 2018. However, the prevalence of disinformation, misogyny and stigmatizing language against the LGBTQI community on online platforms demonstrated that the work remained incomplete.

17. **Mr. Drăghia** (Romania), speaking as a youth delegate, said that young people around the world had questions about whom to believe, how to protect themselves against online threats and what did and did not qualify as hate speech. He asked the Special Rapporteur to share her thoughts on if and how young people could be more involved in the fight for free, accurate and objective information, and whether the United Nations had a strategic vision to protect all young persons against incitement to hatred and online violence.

18. **Mr. Reichwein** (Kingdom of the Netherlands) said that his country condemned the spread of gendered disinformation and agreed that strategies to fight disinformation must be firmly grounded in human rights. Too often, censorship was employed under the guise of countering disinformation, but gendered disinformation could only be fought by promoting information integrity and empowering women and gender nonconforming persons.

19. He noted the Special Rapporteur’s recommendation that States empower women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons through literacy training in national school curricula and development plans, but asked what could be done to empower those groups in the short term.

20. **Ms. Tickner** (Colombia) said that the right to freedom of expression was enshrined in her country’s Constitution. In 2022, the Government of Colombia had

also passed a law to combat digital gender-based violence and introduce measures aimed at prevention, protection, redress and criminalization. Given the Special Rapporteur's view that laws should be designed to restrict gendered disinformation without impinging on fundamental rights, she asked how to introduce an intersectional approach that would reflect multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination, such as those based on gender, sexuality, race, ethnic origin or disability.

21. **Ms. Freudenreich** (France) said that online disinformation could be used to discredit or silence women and LGBT+ persons. Most female journalists reported having experienced online violence in the course of their work, sometimes accompanied by physical violence. France had decided to respond by joining the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-based Online Harassment and Abuse. She asked how the Special Rapporteur intended to contribute to negotiations on a global digital compact, bearing in mind gender-related issues, among others.

22. **Ms. Horváth** (Hungary) said that members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community were guaranteed protection under Hungarian law, contrary to the unfounded and false allegations in the Special Rapporteur's report. The country's law on equal treatment prohibited direct and indirect discrimination or harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, while a person who committed assault on such grounds could be sentenced to a maximum of eight years in prison. In addition, a person who incited hatred against a specific demographic group based on sexual orientation or gender identity could be sentenced to up to three years' imprisonment. In light of the relevant legislation, she asked whether anyone still believed that public officials in Hungary were committing hate crimes on a daily basis.

23. **Ms. Qureshi** (Pakistan) said that her delegation hoped that the Special Rapporteur's next report would focus on religious disinformation, which led to Islamophobia, religious intolerance, discrimination, incitement to hatred, hostility and violence. It would be helpful if the Special Rapporteur could clarify whether she considered Islamophobia a manifestation of religious disinformation.

24. In India, Muslim women and Dalit women were subjected to systematic disinformation campaigns with the complicity of a Government led by proponents of Hindutva ideology. Furthermore, many female journalists, human rights defenders and civil society activists in Indian-occupied Kashmir were subjected to

disinformation campaigns that threatened their human rights.

25. **Ms. Monica** (Bangladesh) said that it would be helpful to hear how the Special Rapporteur's office was engaging, or planning to engage, with social media platforms, given her recommendation that private companies develop clear content moderation policies on gendered disinformation in accordance with human rights standards.

26. Freedom of expression was often used as a pretext for the instigation of violence or hatred based on race, religion or belief, as well as the spreading of offensive and misogynistic messages, especially against women in public office or other high positions. She asked what steps States could take to counter such problems.

27. **Ms. Wallenius** (Canada) said that gendered disinformation, and especially the threats women and gender nonconforming persons encountered online, had the potential to silence them and reduce their capacity to enjoy freedom of expression. She asked how the international community could support efforts to counter the harmful values fuelling the phenomenon.

28. **Mr. Bauwens** (Belgium) said that his country was especially worried about the grave and disproportionate level of attacks against female politicians, journalists and human rights defenders, which significantly curtailed the outreach, influence and impact of female public figures. Belgium agreed that the international community should promote a gender-transformative approach to online threats, including by addressing the underlying factors, and he asked the Special Rapporteur to share examples of best practice.

29. **Ms. Berg** (Norway) said that a gendered response to online threats that included a focus on the underlying factors was clearly needed. She asked the Special Rapporteur for advice on how to orient negotiations on a global digital compact in order to build consensus on the standards and approaches that would make the Internet accessible and safe for all.

30. **Ms. Skoczek** (Poland) said that the challenges posed by disinformation were particularly evident in conflict settings, such as the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine. Poland condemned cynical attempts by Russian officials to distort facts and whitewash a brutal and illegal war of aggression by spreading disinformation and propaganda. She asked what the most effective measures were to counter disinformation, regardless of its character.

31. **Ms. Alexandridou** (Greece) said that it would be helpful to know how States could better promote gendered responses to disinformation and online threats

targeting individuals because of their actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. The Government of Greece had sought to address gendered disinformation by establishing a national strategy on LGBTIQ+ equality as well as an inclusive taskforce focused on the protection and safety of journalists and media professionals.

32. **Ms. Wagner** (Switzerland) asked what the best course of action was, given the Special Rapporteur's view that legal measures, including criminal law, were of limited use in countering the deception and deeply rooted bias and prejudice at the heart of gendered disinformation campaigns.

33. **Mr. Tun** (Myanmar) said that his country faced a grave crisis with respect to freedom of opinion and expression following the illegal coup. Over a period of 32 months, the military junta had closed 13 media outlets, arrested 156 journalists and killed a number of others. The only way to reinstate fundamental rights was to end the military dictatorship, restore democracy and build a federal democratic union. He asked the Special Rapporteur to share examples of best practice aimed at strengthening the international community's response to nation-led efforts to reinstate the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

34. **Ms. Toschi** (Luxembourg) said that, as a country with a feminist foreign policy, Luxembourg welcomed the specific recommendations the Special Rapporteur had made to private-sector players, such as social media companies, which played an important role in the prevention and moderation of content that qualified as gendered disinformation. She asked how the Special Rapporteur interacted with the private sector and how Member States could support her in that regard.

35. **Mr. Kulháněk** (Czechia) said that his country was outraged by the horrific terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas against Israel. With respect to the matter at hand, one way to counter disinformation and harmful content was to establish closer cooperation with online platforms. He asked what joint measures could be taken by Governments and social media companies to mitigate the gendered disinformation that disproportionately affected women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.

36. **Ms. Sonkar** (India) said that the right to freedom of opinion and expression was enshrined in the Constitution of India and upheld by an independent and active judiciary. However, violations of the law could not be condoned under the pretext of human rights. India would not allow terrorists and their sponsors to take advantage of the country's openness and freedom to create disaffection, division and animosity. She

completely rejected the malicious references made by Pakistan to the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, which were an integral part of India.

37. **Ms. Soyka** (Austria) said that gendered disinformation was a growing human rights challenge, inhibiting the free expression of women and representing a form of gender-based violence. Given that teenagers were particularly vulnerable to gendered disinformation, she wondered what safeguards could be used to protect young people and what instruments would enable them to identify gender-based violence and misogynistic hate speech.

38. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that a distinction should be made between threats against certain groups of people and, for example, statements in defence of the traditional family as a natural union between a man and a woman. Even more dangerous was the widespread intolerance, primarily in European Union countries, towards religions and nationalities, in particular Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, Christianophobia and Russophobia. Social media networks controlled by Western countries did not prohibit calls to kill or discriminate against Russians. He wondered whether such calls could be justified in terms of the right to freedom of expression.

39. **Ms. Billingsley** (United States of America) said that freedom of expression was under threat around the globe, including in Belarus, the Russian Federation, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China. In Viet Nam, Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, individuals continued to be detained for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression. The United States was deeply concerned by the proliferation and abuse of laws used to curtail freedom of expression, including restrictions on expression that authorities arbitrarily characterized as "extremist" without any link to violence. She asked the Special Rapporteur how the international community could more effectively address attempts to limit freedom of expression under the pretext of countering terrorism.

40. **Mr. Devereaux** (United Kingdom) said that the use of gendered disinformation to exclude women from public life, especially during flashpoints like elections, was particularly alarming. His country had introduced a new Online Safety Bill to hold social media platforms responsible for the content they hosted and was engaged in international and bilateral work to mitigate threats to the rights of women and girls. While there was a need to respond to the specific nature of gendered disinformation, he asked how the international

community could prevent it from becoming a siloed issue.

41. **Ms. Rizk** (Egypt) said that her delegation categorically disagreed with the premise of the report presented by the Special Rapporteur as a misappropriation of the women's rights agenda. However, she agreed that action was needed to address abuses and violations of the rights of women and girls in the digital context. Preventive measures included legal and policy action to raise awareness of the risks and benefits associated with the use of information and communications technology, as well as legislative and regulatory measures at the national, regional and international levels to govern the operations of social media platforms. The advancement of women required collective action rather than divisive approaches.

42. **Mr. Zhang** Tianhao (China) said that his country rejected the unprovoked accusations of the United States. Freedom of expression was guaranteed by his country's Constitution, but it was not absolute. It had to be exercised within the confines of the law, and without jeopardizing the rights of the State, society and other citizens. Since the end of the cold war, the United States had been trying to manipulate the media and perpetuating double standards. His delegation called upon the United States to stop discrediting China.

43. **Ms. Arab Bafrani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that her country's Constitution granted a variety of fundamental universal rights, including freedom of expression. Her delegation therefore categorically rejected the unsupported and unfounded allegations made in the Special Rapporteur's report, which were political in nature and had been included at the request of certain States.

44. **Mr. Altarsha** (Syrian Arab Republic) asked the Special Rapporteur whether she had considered that coming up with a weird concept such as gendered disinformation might not be a wise choice. She should read the room; it was not hard to see who was rooting for her and who was not. The Special Rapporteur was supposed to help all Member States, not produce reports that would widen existing divisions. She had no right to distort the right to freedom of opinion and expression by coming up with unknown concepts.

45. **Mr. Barreto Da Rocha Paranhos** (Brazil) said that his country had established a working group to fight disinformation, hate speech and political violence against women and other groups, especially in the digital sphere. The Ministry of Women had been created in 2023 to promote gender equality and develop policies to prevent and combat all forms of discrimination, misogyny and gender-based violence.

46. **Ms. Tokarska** (Ukraine) said that the Russian Federation had used disinformation to support its unjustified and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. For decades, systematic manipulation of information, repressive legislation and violence in the Russian Federation and Belarus had led to the suppression of civil and political freedoms and had created a political environment in which outright military aggression could proceed unchecked. The persecution by the Russian Federation of human rights defenders, independent journalists and media professionals had intensified since the start of the war.

47. **Mr. Dang** Tran Nam Trung (Viet Nam) said that his country was fully committed to upholding all human rights, including freedom of expression. His delegation was disappointed by the unfounded accusation made by the representative of the United States, which it completely rejected.

48. **Mr. McGuire** (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) said that there was a propensity in positivist societies to wield the power of opinion and expression to opposing extremes. Pope Saint John Paul II had stated that liberty had its foundation in man's very nature, the characteristic of which was to be free, and it continued to exist even in those who did not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it; the exercise of that right was not to be impeded, provided that the just requirements of public order were observed.

49. **Ms. Khan** (Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression) said that she was grateful to delegations for recognizing the importance of the subject at hand. The single dissenting delegate had demonstrated the point made in the report regarding the treatment of women in public spaces.

50. One common question pertained to how to help women and gender nonconforming persons who were under attack. The answer was to empower them, since empowerment gave women and other groups whose rights had been trampled the means to fight back. The report highlighted examples of civil society groups around the world that were strengthening the capacity of those who were being attacked online to produce counter speech. Disinformation was full of lies, so the way to address it was by putting out facts.

51. Digital literacy and Internet access were key tools. Women had far less access to the Internet than men. Where women did not have access to the Internet, and either their Government was not providing the factual, clear information they needed or media restrictions were impeding the free flow of information, they were obviously at a disadvantage compared with those who

were attacking them. Ensuring that information could flow freely and women were able to access it, including by boosting digital literacy and building the capacity of women's groups and civil society groups, was therefore extremely important.

52. Laws had a very distinct and limited role to play in the context of disinformation. They could not combat prejudice and bias, although they were helpful in fighting violence and discrimination. It was true that freedom of expression was not absolute, but Governments should respect international law when introducing measures to curtail it.

53. In relation to the role of companies, the report included a number of examples in which multi-stakeholder forums had been established at the country level, bringing together local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), companies and civil society groups. Gendered disinformation was highly contextualized, so companies needed to invest in local languages and cultural expertise in order to understand how disinformation played out for women and nonconforming persons in different parts of the world.

54. State regulation of social media should focus not on content but on ensuring that companies followed the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, conducted due diligence, carried out human rights impact assessments and took measures to mitigate the risks posed by their products. Once again, civil society, women's groups and others had a key role to play in addressing the issue.

55. She urged the delegation of Hungary to read the report she had submitted after her visit to the country, which had been discussed in the Human Rights Council in 2022. A number of States, including the United Kingdom, had sought her advice in relation to legislation and she encouraged others to do the same, so that she could provide advice and guidance in line with international standards and the context in which they were working.

56. The international community should seek to empower women rather than merely protect them, and favour a multi-stakeholder approach. The global digital compact process was an interesting case in point, since digital issues were inherently international and could not be solved with national laws.

57. **Mr. Voule** (Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association), introducing his report (see [A/78/246](#)), said that the world faced ever-deepening insecurity with the spread of violent conflicts, military coups and failed

democratic transitions, often driven by inequalities and injustice. The international community should listen to those most affected in order to address the root causes of conflict and ensure lasting peace. It was time to act, to prioritize collective security and to put aside political and ideological differences. Moreover, the United Nations should act with commitment and leadership in order to secure inclusive peace and democratic transitions.

58. His report highlighted the role played by civil society, social movements and informal community-based groups, including female peacebuilding activists, in conflict prevention and the peace process. However, those calling for equality, democratic freedom, justice and human rights were often ignored, undermined and even suppressed. Civil society activists operating in transitional environments faced intimidation and attacks by both State and non-State actors, and were subjected to enforced disappearance, kidnapping, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killing or summary execution, and torture or ill-treatment. That led to self-censorship and withdrawal from participation in public affairs.

59. In order to reverse the situation, the following concrete measures should be taken, among others, as recommended in his report. States should proactively and publicly promote the inclusion of civil society and communities in peacebuilding and political transition processes. The international community and States should support national and grass-roots peace movements. States should refrain from suppressing dissent and adopt laws and strategies allowing civil society to engage in peace and transition processes. Technical and financial support should be provided to civil society groups to enable active and meaningful participation. The international community should avoid legitimizing actors responsible for human rights violations. Lastly, States and the international community should ensure robust and timely accountability for all acts of reprisal and human rights violations against activists and protesters.

60. The United Nations had an important role to play and should exercise leadership to make the meaningful participation of civil society groups, including female activists, a requirement in all peace and political processes it supported. It should ensure that missions in conflict, post-conflict and transitional contexts were mandated and resourced to document and report on human rights violations related to the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. The protection of those rights was essential in order to achieve the priorities set by the Secretary-General in the policy brief entitled "A New Agenda for Peace" ([A/77/CRP.1/Add.8](#)) and in particular to ensure that

national peace efforts were people-centred, to guarantee respect for the full spectrum of human rights and to dismantle power dynamics.

61. **Ms. Pavluta-Deslandes** (Latvia), speaking on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries, said that the Special Rapporteur's report came at a time of increasing global uncertainty, including with respect to the unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. She asked how the role of the international community could be enhanced to support the inclusive participation of individuals and groups in sustainable peace and democratic transition processes.

62. **Ms. Wagner** (Switzerland) said that the Special Rapporteur's report demonstrated that an inclusive approach to decision-making could help to prevent the resurgence of conflicts. She asked the Special Rapporteur to share any examples of best practice that could serve as a basis for future peace or democratic transition processes.

63. Switzerland was alarmed by repeated threats and the use of force during peaceful protests around the world in recent months, and called upon both State and non-State actors to refrain from violence, intimidation and reprisals. States bore primary responsibility for promoting, protecting and honouring human rights during protests.

64. **Mr. Devereaux** (United Kingdom) said that civil society could ensure more sustainable settlements by representing non-combatants and those who suffered during conflicts, and could play a vital role in strengthening governance. He asked how States could best ensure that civic space was not co-opted by those seeking to undermine the inclusive transition.

65. **Ms. Kanwal** (Pakistan) said that the Special Rapporteur was right to observe that, under the pretext of maintaining security, peace and transition processes, some States had issued or imposed de facto blanket bans on assemblies and misused broad national security and counter-terrorism laws to criminalize activists and protesters.

66. India continued to impinge upon the human rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, including the right to self-determination, in flagrant violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

67. She asked how the international community could play a role in protecting the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association of civil society organizations and human rights defenders in situations of foreign occupation.

68. **Ms. Carlé** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that there could be no inclusive, progressive and sustainable peace if the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association were not exercised freely, or if civil society groups were sidelined or silent. She asked the Special Rapporteur to elaborate on the establishment of an independent investigation and accountability mechanism in response to serious human rights violations against human rights defenders and protesters.

69. **Mr. Kulháněk** (Czechia) said that his country agreed that States should guarantee adequate protection of civil society by adopting laws, removing regulatory restrictions and ensuring independent investigations of alleged rights violations. He asked how the international community should react to violations of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and whether the Special Rapporteur would recommend the use of sanctions.

70. Restrictive legislation implemented by the Russian Federation had led to the dissolution of many human rights organizations, mass arrests and the criminalization of civil society activists. Furthermore, the Wagner Group's activities in a number of countries were hampering democratization processes and threatening civic engagement. That must not be tolerated. Czechia considered the protection of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association an essential pre-requisite for a functioning democratic State.

71. **Mr. Kridelka** (Belgium), speaking also on behalf of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Luxembourg, said that women's organizations and female peacebuilders and human rights defenders had an important role to play in securing peace. The Benelux countries unequivocally condemned intimidation of and violence against women and girls, especially in times of conflict, for exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. Furthermore, failing to include young people, LGBTQI+ persons, victims' groups and other marginalized communities perpetuated violence and discrimination. Protecting and promoting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of such groups needed to be an integral part of the work of the General Assembly, Peacebuilding Commission and Security Council. He asked how the recommendations set out in the report could be integrated into the New Agenda for Peace, in particular with respect to the aforementioned communities.

72. **Ms. Monica** (Bangladesh) said that the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association were guaranteed in Bangladesh, where civil society

organizations had formed an integral part of post-war nation-building efforts. The 26,000 national and international NGOs registered in Bangladesh played a pivotal role in poverty alleviation, good governance, community development and the furtherance of functioning democracy.

73. The Special Rapporteur had recommended that the protection of civil society and the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association be included in the mandates of political and peacekeeping operations. She asked how he planned to engage with the relevant stakeholders in that regard and what role host countries would play.

74. The Special Rapporteur had also called on the international community to ensure that civil society organizations had access to resources, including foreign funding, regardless of their registration status. She asked how that would affect efforts to combat the financing of organized crime, including terrorist financing, especially when such acts were perpetrated by entities that were unregistered and therefore hard to identify.

75. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that, while his delegation could agree that the safe and effective realization of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association was an essential part of peace processes, the limitations of the law must also be taken into account. Those rights should not be interpreted in a way that produced serious consequences, especially not the overthrow of legitimately elected Governments, often with support from abroad. That led to chaos and arbitrariness, not peace and democracy. A textbook example was modern-day Ukraine, where in 2013 what had begun as peaceful assemblies had ended with an unconstitutional coup d'état supported by the West. In line with its double standards, the West supported some coups d'état but not others.

76. In paragraph 61 of his report, the Special Rapporteur had mistakenly referred to the presence in Africa of a certain Wagner Group, which was allegedly spreading fear among civil society and activists. In fact, security officials were helping African partners to combat terrorism. It was a shame that the Special Rapporteur had not drawn attention to the activities of United States and British private military companies, which were known for their crimes.

77. **Ms. Brzeski** (United States of America) said that her country was deeply concerned by unlawful restrictions on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in many countries. The Lukashenko regime in Belarus continued to pursue

politically motivated prosecutions and had convicted some 470 peaceful protesters in 2023 alone. In addition, the Russian Federation had detained more than 19,000 peaceful anti-war protesters since launching its full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022. The Kremlin continued to use repressive laws to harass or effectively outlaw peaceful civil society groups and independent media. She asked what tools the international community had at its disposal to promote the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in States that showed little interest in protecting them.

78. **Mr. Mahidi** (Austria) said that civil society made vital, but often overlooked, contributions to the establishment of sustainable peace and democratic transition. He asked the Special Rapporteur to discuss the important role of free and active civil society organizations in supporting sustainable development, and asked how States could create a favourable civic space to allow civil society to better contribute to sustainable peace and development.

79. **Ms. Tickner** (Colombia) said that events in her country had shown that civil society played an essential role, not only in contributing to peace negotiations but also in establishing peace when Governments lacked the political will to do so. Colombia was developing specific strategies to foster a safe and inclusive participatory environment, especially for women and other vulnerable social groups, including a national development plan, a security and defence policy and a national action plan pursuant to Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#).

80. There could be no peace without the involvement of those who experienced violence on a daily basis and were working towards its elimination. She asked whether the Special Rapporteur had specific suggestions on how to guarantee that traditionally marginalized groups were genuinely able to participate throughout the process of devising peacebuilding policies, both at the national level and within multilateral spaces such as the United Nations.

81. **Mr. Zhang Tianhao** (China) said that Chinese law fully guaranteed rights and freedoms to all citizens. However, the Constitution of China stipulated that no freedom was absolute. Demonstrations were to be conducted peacefully and must not be disturbed, impacted or sabotaged by violent coercion or any other illegal means.

82. The approach taken by China was in line with common practice in many countries as well as the spirit of international human rights instruments. However, certain countries had long held double standards. For example, the United States had declared the riot on

Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. an attempted coup; when similar incidents occurred in developing countries, it claimed the attackers were exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and imposed unilateral sanctions. China urged the United States to stop politicizing human rights, imposing double standards and violating the human rights of persons in other countries.

83. **Mr. Voule** (Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association) said that he was grateful for the interest that delegations had shown in his report. Several speakers had asked how the international community could play a greater role, or strengthen the protection afforded to civil society and women's groups. In his report, he had made a number of recommendations aimed at ensuring that the international community's investment in the peace and transition process proved effective.

84. First, it was essential that civil society groups be considered important stakeholders rather than a threat. In many instances, victims' groups, young persons, women and community groups had played a pivotal role in bringing warring parties to the negotiating table. When such processes were overseen by the international community, there was an unfortunate tendency to sideline people who had suffered during the conflict, but those very groups had the best understanding of the causes behind it.

85. Second, it was vital for the international community to advocate for the participation of those groups in peace or transition processes when regimes started to suppress or exclude dissenting voices. It was clear that transition processes often failed because the warring parties had shifted their focus to their own interests or survival rather than the peace process itself. That was precisely what had happened in the Sudan, despite warnings from civil society groups.

86. Several delegations had asked for examples of best practice. Unfortunately, those were becoming increasingly rare. With a number of processes still incomplete after more than a decade, it was time to ask serious questions. The reason why peace had not been achieved in so many settings, despite the money, time and effort invested, was that the international community had prioritized the warring parties over communities and community leaders. It was important to change approach because warring parties who felt emboldened by international recognition had a tendency to seek alliances and rekindle the war.

87. It was preferable for sanctions to target the individuals accused of grave human rights violations or crimes against humanity rather than the general

population. The international community must hold perpetrators accountable for their actions by imposing financial consequences. Consistency was vital; imposing sanctions but then allowing the targeted individuals to open bank accounts in other countries was unacceptable. Most conflicts continued because the war was in the economic interests of the warring parties. As long as they had safe places to store their money and the ability to do business, there could be no peace.

88. Certain delegations had asked what instruments the international community had at its disposal and how to support the participation of civil society. The key point was to take action. In Afghanistan, for example, the international community had supported the involvement of women in the peace process, but had not responded or imposed any sanctions when they were subsequently excluded. Legal proceedings and legislation should be in place to address cases where human rights defenders came under attack or steps were taken to exclude women's groups in countries engaged in the peace or transition process.

89. It was vital to take the needs of marginalized groups into account as part of the peace and transition process, since such persons were generally worst affected by repression and human rights violations. There should be acceptance of groups advocating for the marginalized, and the international community should step in when no further progress was being made. The United Nations should be able to require the participation of certain groups, since it was ultimately held responsible when a peace or transition process failed. For too long, the international community had sought to accommodate warring parties and sidelined the women's and youth groups they saw as a threat.

90. With a rising number of conflicts breaking out around the world, he called upon the international community to set aside its disagreements and ideological differences before it was too late to sit around the negotiating table. It was time to take concrete steps to bring an end to the injustice and repression in evidence around the world, which reduced civic space and set the scene for crisis and conflict. Amid terrorism fuelled by injustice and unemployment, as well as crises linked to migration and flows of refugees, it was incumbent upon the international community to come together in the interests of protecting global security.

91. Lastly, it had been shocking to hear the way in which the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic had addressed the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The Committee was a space of dialogue and respect, and Special Rapporteurs had a right and a duty

to raise matters for discussion. He could not accept such an attack and he did not believe that the Committee should tolerate it either.

92. **Ms. Lawlor** (Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders), introducing her report (A/78/131), said that, in conflict situations, women human rights defenders helped people reach safety or find what they needed to stay alive; held communities together; monitored and documented human rights violations, and pursued justice and accountability. Unfortunately, all too often, women as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons were forced out of the public sphere by online and physical attacks, including gendered smear campaigns, threats, sexual assault, abduction and murder. Later, during the negotiation of peace agreements, pledges to safeguard the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons were often among the first provisions abandoned, especially when women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons were not at the negotiating table.

93. As the Israeli bombardments continued, women were reporting on the plight of ordinary Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The atrocities committed by Hamas were war crimes, but so was the collective punishment of Palestinian civilians by Israel.

94. It was not enough to recognize the role of women human rights defenders in building peace and security. To fulfil that role, they must be protected. Many faced overlapping dangers because of what they did and who they were.

95. She was tired of making recommendations that were ignored. States could take a number of actions immediately, at no cost, to protect women human rights defenders. They could frequently and publicly condemn attacks on them; celebrate their work; stop using language that stigmatized, abused, disparaged or discriminated against them; invite them to address United Nations bodies and ensure that they were not subjected to intimidation and reprisals afterwards; and take up violations of their rights in third countries even when the cases were of no political or strategic interest. Protecting people whose work was essential to achieve a just, inclusive and sustainable peace was common sense.

96. **Ms. Skoczek** (Poland) said that her country greatly valued the work of human rights defenders and was a strong supporter of the women and peace and security agenda. As a neighbour of Ukraine, Poland was very much aware of the crucial role Ukrainian women played in providing support to victims and on the front line. Women should also be present at the negotiating

table. States owed all women human rights defenders safety and protection from abuse, intimidation and harassment.

97. **Ms. Alameri** (United Arab Emirates) said that her country's unwavering commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights was evident in its domestic legal framework and its respect for due process. The United Arab Emirates would continue to engage and cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other United Nations human rights mechanisms and entities.

98. **Ms. Wallenius** (Canada) said that her delegation would be interested in hearing about best practices for protecting women human rights defenders participating in high-level forums from reprisal. It also wished to know what mechanisms or measures could be used to hold persons attacking women human rights defenders online accountable and to prevent online violence from spilling over into the physical world.

99. **Ms. Freudenreich** (France) said that her Government was particularly concerned about the growing number of attacks on women human rights defenders motivated by conservatism. She asked what measures could be taken to promote the participation of women human rights defenders in peace processes.

100. **Mr. Zitko** (Slovenia) said that his delegation would be interested in learning about any cross-border cooperation or exchanges of experiences between networks of women human rights defenders.

101. **Ms. Brandt** (Kingdom of the Netherlands), speaking also on behalf of Belgium and Luxembourg, said that the three countries appreciated the Special Rapporteur's emphasis on the invaluable contributions of women human rights defenders to peace and security and were grateful for her recommendations on how States could protect them.

102. **Mr. Belmont Roldán** (Spain) said that, as President of the Council of the European Union, his country would be organizing an international seminar to explore avenues available to the European Union for facilitating visas for human rights defenders who were at risk. He would appreciate the Special Rapporteur's views on how States and the international community could protect young women and girls defending human rights in post-conflict situations, support their work and facilitate their participation in peace processes.

103. **Mr. Elizondo Belden** (Mexico) said that his Government condemned all attacks and reprisals against women human rights defenders and journalists. Mexico had been the driving force behind the recent establishment of an Ibero-American network of women

mediators, and during its presidency of the Security Council, it had required all civil society briefers to be women. He would appreciate more information on innovative laws and policies for protecting women human rights defenders.

104. **Ms. Brattested** (Norway), speaking on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries, said that the countries were deeply concerned about attacks on women human rights defenders, especially those working for gender equality and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons and against gender-based violence. All States should strengthen the protection of women human rights defenders and support their participation in United Nations meetings, networks, processes and events.

105. **Mr. Tun** (Myanmar) said that women human rights defenders remained at the forefront of opposition to the military dictatorship in his country, despite grave physical danger and harassment.

106. **Ms. Al Jaradi** (Oman), speaking also on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, said that the member countries would appreciate the Special Rapporteur's views on how international cooperation to combat hate speech could be strengthened.

107. **Ms. Carlé** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that her delegation wished to know how States could better support women human rights defenders working in rural or remote locations. States must do more to actively protect women human rights defenders and ensure accountability.

108. **Mr. Kulháněk** (Czechia) said that his delegation would appreciate examples of best practices for encouraging the reporting of attacks on women rights defenders.

109. **Ms. Wagner** (Switzerland) said that her delegation wished to know how the collection of data on attacks on women human rights defenders could be improved. Switzerland urged States to strengthen their mechanisms for protecting women human rights defenders, taking into consideration intersectional risks.

110. **Ms. Monica** (Bangladesh) said that, during her country's war of liberation, more than 200,000 women had experienced sexual violence. That painful legacy had led Bangladesh to contribute to international efforts to combat conflict-related sexual violence and to ensure women's equal participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

111. **Ms. Al-mashehari** (Yemen) said that her delegation would be interested in the Special Rapporteur's views on the deterrent effect of imposing more sanctions on persons and entities associated with the Houthi terrorist militias, which were responsible for grave violations of the rights of women human rights defenders.

112. **Ms. Pella** (Indonesia), referring to paragraph 71 of the report, said that human rights assessments should not be based on the testimony of a single individual. Her delegation would be interested in information on best practices for upholding the rights of human rights defenders transparently while complying with national law.

113. **Mr. Devereaux** (United Kingdom) said that all States should promote the contributions and legitimacy of women human rights defenders and take all necessary actions to protect them from harm. He asked how States and civil society organizations could improve access to flexible assistance for women human rights defenders who were at risk.

114. **Ms. Mahidi** (Austria) said that her delegation was alarmed by the scale of attacks on women working for peace and security, including the high number who experienced threats and reprisals after briefing the Security Council. She asked what steps the United Nations could take to protect such women.

115. **Mr. Kouakou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that laws protecting human rights defenders should take women human rights defenders into account. Côte d'Ivoire had enacted a law on the protection of human rights defenders in 2014, and it encouraged other States to do likewise.

116. **Ms. Lortkipanidze** (Georgia) said that in the Russian-occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, Georgians, including women activists, continued to endure grave violations of their rights and fundamental freedoms. Her Government promoted regular dialogue with women affected by the conflict and their civil society representatives in the context of the Geneva International Discussions, and women activists and NGOs had been actively involved in drafting the most recent national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security.

117. **Mr. Drescher** (Germany) said that his country remained deeply concerned about the treatment of countless human rights defenders around the world, including women such as Narges Mohammadi of the Islamic Republic of Iran. All States had a responsibility to create and uphold a safe environment in which human

rights defenders could work peacefully without fear of detention, violence or other forms of reprisal, and without being silenced.

118. **Ms. Fernández Carter** (Chile) said that, thanks to consultations with Chilean human rights defenders, her Government had identified the need to establish differentiated protection procedures for different groups of defenders with different risk levels. Protecting women human rights defenders required an understanding of the risks specific to women as caregivers for children.

119. **Ms. Mimran Rosenberg** (Israel) said that the Special Rapporteur should direct her accusations at the Hamas terrorist organization, which was using more than 150 Israelis, including a woman human rights defender, as human shields.

120. **Ms. Sonkar** (India) said that her delegation categorically rejected the baseless assertion in the Special Rapporteur's report regarding her country's treatment of women human rights defenders; human rights defenders needed to obey the law. Pakistan should not use the United Nations platform to advance its nefarious political agenda, and her delegation dismissed its accusations.

121. **Ms. Kanwal** (Pakistan) said that women human rights defenders in occupied Kashmir faced sexual and gender-based violence, enforced disappearance, torture and inhuman treatment, unlawful detention, stigmatization, smear campaigns, cyberbullying, harassment and threats to their families. Their activities were banned or severely restricted, and they were harshly punished for pursuing them. She asked how women human rights defenders in situations of foreign occupation could seek redress for human rights abuses. She also wished to know how United Nations human rights mechanisms could facilitate their work.

122. **Ms. Swan** (Ireland) said that women human rights defenders played an essential role in bringing the impact of sexual and gender-based violence to light. Her delegation would be interested in hearing what steps States could take to prevent reprisals against them.

123. **Ms. Sánchez García** (Colombia) said that her Government had strengthened the national programme for the protection of the human rights of women leaders and human rights defenders. While the primary goal of the programme was to prevent attacks and murders, it was also designed to end stigmatization and stop the criminalization of their work.

124. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russia Federation) said that the Special Rapporteur's report made baseless allegations against his Government while ignoring human rights

violations committed by the Ukrainian authorities, which had kidnapped and arrested journalists and activists such as human rights defender Elena Berezhnaya in order to suppress dissent.

125. **Ms. Arab Bafrani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that special procedure mandate holders should base their reports on information obtained from official, reliable sources. No one in her country had been detained or sentenced for educating women in disadvantaged situations. The Islamic Republic of Iran acknowledged the contribution of all people, including women, to sustainable development. Her delegation categorically rejected the politically motivated statement of the representative of Germany. A self-proclaimed human rights defender was not above the law.

126. **Mr. Murphy** (United States of America) said that terrorism was never justified, and Israel had the right to defend itself. The United States condemned the politically motivated prison sentences given to five members of the human rights organization Viasna in Belarus, including Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Ales Bialiatski, and it was concerned about the many human rights defenders who faced criminal prosecution in China, including Ding Jiaxi and Xu Zhiyong.

127. **Mr. Zhang Tianhao** (China) said that his country was governed by the rule of law. If self-proclaimed human rights defenders were prosecuted in China, it was because they had broken the law. His delegation condemned the United States practice of criticizing China for its treatment of human rights defenders. The United States should reflect on its own human rights record and stop pointing the finger at other countries. Regarding the report, the Special Rapporteur should eschew unverified information and discharge her mandate in an impartial and objective manner.

128. **Mr. Barreto Da Rocha Paranhos** (Brazil) said that his Government was working to strengthen Brazilian policies and laws to ensure that human rights defenders could go about their work in a safe and enabling environment. It was also committed to combating any form of harassment, intimidation or violence against them.

129. **Ms. Lawlor** (Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders) said that, to listen to the delegations, one would think that all of the States were paragons of virtue. In fact, they were motivated by their own political and strategic interests. Instead of focusing on human rights principles, international human rights standards and what they could do better, the delegations sniped at each other. Countries touted their laws and their respect for them, and claimed that anyone who broke the law was a criminal, not a human rights

defender. All over the world, vague laws that did not meet international standards were being used against human rights defenders. She could not applaud respect for such laws. She did, however, wish to commend the 12 States that had provided submissions for the report.

130. She was tired of making recommendations and listening to questions that had already been answered in her reports. Following up on even one or two of those recommendations would improve the situation of human rights defenders.

131. It was the responsibility of the States, not the Special Rapporteur, to protect women human rights defenders from violence against them, which had grown with their increasing participation in the women and peace and security agenda. For women human rights defenders to participate meaningfully in peace processes, it was imperative to protect them from attacks and reprisals.

132. The support for women human rights defenders expressed by the representative of Poland was commendable, but her country's record spoke otherwise; Polish authorities were continuing to harass and criminalize women human rights defenders who provided aid to refugees. In general, the European Union was behaving shamefully towards refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. She hoped that the proposed meeting would bring progress on the issue of facilitated visas for human rights defenders.

133. The actions of the United Arab Emirates belied its unwavering commitment to support human rights defenders. Three human rights defenders in that country had received 10-year sentences following unfair trials, and 11 years later, they were still in prison.

134. A number of delegations had asked how to increase the participation of women human rights defenders without putting them at risk. States should consult with the women themselves on the measures needed, support them and stand in solidarity with them. They alone knew how much risk they could absorb and whether, for example, there was a danger of reprisal. Perhaps someone needed to accompany a woman who had spoken at the United Nations to the airport, or go home with her from the airport to make sure she was not in danger.

135. Women human rights defenders had developed networks to protect themselves because they could not rely on States. It was essential that States find the political will both to put the necessary laws and policies in place and to implement them afterwards. Women human rights defenders should be seen not as enemies, but as allies, working in accordance with the Declaration

on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

136. The situation in Myanmar was truly awful. With so many new conflicts arising, old conflicts that were still causing brutal hardship and terrible injustice and abuse were easily forgotten.

137. It was time to start calling out States that waged smear campaigns against women human rights defenders. The attack on the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression earlier in the meeting had been offensive and inappropriate.

138. Regarding the protection of remote or marginalized human rights defenders, the first step was to meet with them online. State institutions should then follow up by listing on their websites the person to contact in case of danger. With respect to data collection, a great deal of data was being collected by civil society organizations, and she would be happy to discuss that data with anyone interested.

139. There had been numerous abductions on both sides in Yemen. Women human rights defenders played an important role there and should be included in consultations. It was essential to champion their participation.

140. It was important to encourage young human rights defenders, who would bring the human rights movement into the future. Like women human rights defenders, they needed visibility, access and practical support. They needed to be allowed to participate and to be taken seriously, not only by States but also by the NGOs for which they worked. Some of them were in danger and needed protection.

141. Côte d'Ivoire had been the first African State to enact a law on the protection of human rights defenders, and she hoped to be able to discuss its implementation with the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire. She was grateful to the delegation of Germany for mentioning Narges Mohammadi. In that connection, the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran should be ashamed to vaunt the freedoms enjoyed by women human rights defenders in her country when the wrongful imprisonment of Iranian women human rights defenders had received wide media coverage across the globe. There were other such women who had not received media coverage.

142. She unequivocally condemned the Hamas terrorist attack. However, Hamas could not be blamed exclusively for the explosive situation in Gaza, which was due in part to the 16-year Israeli blockade. Under

international law, attacks that did not distinguish between military targets and civilians were war crimes.

143. She would have liked to have discussed the situation in India and China, but time was short. In closing, she referred the delegations to the final paragraph of her report, in which she listed 17 countries where human rights defenders were still serving sentences of 10 years or more on false charges related to terrorism, anti-State activities, subversion or whatever the Government found convenient.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.