Concept Note

Combating violence against women and domestic violence in Georgia: challenges and achievements

61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61).
Friday, 17 March 2017, 6:30-7:45 PM
Conference Room A, Conference Building
United Nations

Speakers

- Ms. Dubravka Šimonović, Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences
- Ms. Sopo Japaridze, Assistant to the Prime Minister on Human Rights and Gender Equality Issues, Georgia
- Ms. Eka Skhiladze, Deputy Public Defender, Georgia
- Ms. Ana Arganashvili, Partnership for Human Rights, Georgia
- Ms. Louise Nylin, Programme Advisor, UN Women (moderator)

Format

The side event will include an interactive panel of representatives from the Georgian Government, civil society and international organizations. A moderated discussion will take place after the presentations.

Background

As part of her mandate to carry out country visits, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Ms. Dubravka Šimonović, visited Georgia from 15 to 19 February 2016, at the invitation of the Government of Georgia. During her visit, the Special Rapporteur met with many different government representatives, including members of the judiciary and the Public Defender, as well as civil society representatives. She also travelled to different regions within the country and met with populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and women survivors of violence.

The Special Rapporteur published her findings and recommendations to the Government of Georgia in a report (A/HRC/32/42/Add.3), highlighting the remaining gaps and challenges to fulfilling State
obligations to eliminate violence against women. She noted in her report that violence against women in Georgia is widespread and is often tolerated due to entrenched patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory gender stereotypes. The main patterns of violence experienced by women in Georgia are physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse. Domestic violence is still considered to be a private matter in most parts of the country and is therefore underreported. The Special Rapporteur attributed the low rate of reporting to the lack of public awareness about this societal problem, the fear of retaliation and stigmatization, the lack of trust in law enforcement agencies, as well as the existing services and protection mechanisms for victims of violence. Many of these same factors also hinder reporting by women victims of sexual violence, including rape and sexual harassment, for which greater data collection is needed.

The report of the Special Rapporteur also draws attention to the number of femicides/gender-related killings often committed by intimate partners and called for greater effective protections for victims of violence. Additional identified areas of concern include suicide among women victims of systemic violence, child and forced marriages, prenatal sex selection, virginity tests and unregulated surrogate motherhood. The Special Rapporteur also highlighted the discrimination and resulting vulnerabilities to violence of specific groups in Georgia, including women belonging to ethnic minorities, women living in rural areas, internally displaced women, refugees, LGBT and older women.

A number of the recommendations included in the Special Rapporteur’s report are similar to the CEDAW concluding observations to the Georgia State Party report (2014) and the recommendations of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (2015). The report’s recommendations are also in line with the regional Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), which Georgia signed in 2014, but is still in the process of ratifying.

Despite the many challenges, the Government of Georgia has made significant progress in implementing the abovementioned recommendations, and has worked to strengthen its normative and institutional human rights and gender equality framework. The Government has successfully worked across line ministries and in partnership with international organizations and civil society to reform legislation, strengthen institutional mechanisms, improve its judicial and law enforcement responses, raise awareness and improve services for survivors of domestic violence.

In particular, the Government has taken steps to harmonize domestic legislation with CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention, and other human rights frameworks, through the adoption of the 2006 Law of Georgia on Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Domestic Violence; 2010 Law on Gender Equality; criminalization of domestic violence (2012); and the 2014 Law on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination. The Government has also created a number of policies and strategies, including: the National Action Plan (NAP) on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims/Survivors (2016-2017); the NAP on Gender Equality for 2014-2016; a NAP to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security; and a NAP on Combatting Trafficking in Persons.
Important progress has also been made to strengthen institutional mechanisms to advance gender equality and combat violence against women. In addition to the work of the Gender Equality Council within the Parliament, the establishment of the Assistant on Human Rights and Gender Equality in the Office of the Prime Minister, and the important role of the Public Defender’s Office, the Government is in the process of establishing a new institutional mechanism at the executive level. This commission will be mandated to address issues of violence against women and girls and domestic violence, among other issues of gender inequality and discrimination.

Civil society organizations in Georgia play a key role in supporting the Government to implement their commitments to combat violence against women. In addition to providing education and healthcare services, organizations offer information and awareness-raising initiatives on issues of violence and human rights, provide rehabilitation and assistance to survivors of violence and offer targeted support to internally-displaced and vulnerable populations of women throughout the country.

Nevertheless, the Special Rapporteur has detailed a number of remaining gaps and challenges for the Government of Georgia to address in terms of prevention, protection and prosecution. Considering the magnitude of the problem, the Government will need to build upon its successes and continue to work in partnership with relevant stakeholders in order to effectively address violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences.

**Intended outcomes of the event**

The Government of Georgia and UN Women will co-sponsor a side event in the margins of the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The intended outcomes of the event include the following:

- Share good practices and successful legislative and institutional models used in Georgia to end violence against women and girls;
- Increase awareness of the role of the international human rights bodies and special procedures and highlight the ways in which these mechanisms can be used to inform a national approach to combating violence against women;
- Draw attention to the important role of partnerships, particularly with civil society, in combating violence against women and girls and identify areas for further collaboration;
- Reflect on the challenges and gaps to advance the national agenda to end violence against women and girls in Georgia, along with suggested strategies, with a focus on strengthening prevention interventions that are informed by prevalence and incidence studies.