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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Women's Federation for World Peace International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 May 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Protecting women and girls from sexual and gender based violence

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and femicide are pervasive issues that transcend cultural, economic, and geographical boundaries, constituting a global pandemic that affects millions of lives. The statistics are alarming: from January 1st to 31st, 2024, there were 240 recorded femicide cases across 26 different countries, highlighting the urgent need for action. Regions such as Africa, particularly Southern Africa, and Latin America (LATAM) are disproportionately affected, often leading global lists of rape rates. Countries like South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua are frequently cited for their high levels of SGBV.

The gravity of the situation is underscored by the estimated 20,000 women killed by their partners or ex-partners in 2022 on the African continent, and the at least 4,050 women who fell victim to femicide in LATAM and the Caribbean during the same period. These figures are a stark reminder of the devastating impact of SGBV and femicide on individuals, families, and communities.

In response to this crisis, various international, regional, and national frameworks have been established to recognize SGBV as a violation of human rights and to affirm the state's obligation to protect victims and end gendered violence. Key among these are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action, and United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS).

At a regional level, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has implemented its 2015 Gender Protocol and its 2018-2022 Regional Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security. In LATAM, the Convention of Belém do Pará, or the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women, has been in place since 1994.

Despite these frameworks, addressing SGBV and femicide requires a holistic and identity-sensitive approach that challenges harmful, patriarchal social norms. This is evident in the data from both Southern Africa and LATAM, where stigma and fear of retribution often prevent survivors from seeking help. For instance, in Namibia, 42% of the population believes a woman will face criticism, harassment, or shame if she reports a crime, leading to only 14.9% of intimate partner violence survivors seeking police assistance. In South Africa, 43% of citizens hold similar beliefs, with only 66% of those without formal education trusting the police to take SGBV cases seriously.

In Costa Rica, 'machismo' culture stigmatizes SGBV survivors, while in Nicaragua, fear of social stigma, retribution, and economic insecurity further discourage reporting. To address these challenges, many states in the SADC and LATAM regions have adopted holistic strategies that aim to tackle the root causes and exacerbating factors of high SGBV rates, including institutionalized patriarchy, unequal societal views on gender roles, harmful cultural and religious practices, and community stigma around SGBV.

These strategies include the establishment of one-stop SGBV centers, which provide comprehensive post-rape care, including medical care, psycho-social support, legal aid, and assistance with reporting SGBV. These centers also run awareness-raising campaigns to educate communities about the nature of gendered violence. Examples include South Africa's Thuthuzela Care Centres (TCCs), Namibia's Gender-Based Violence Investigation Units (GBVIU), and various initiatives in Lesotho, Botswana, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Eswatini, Madagascar, Mauritius, the Seychelles, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, and Tanzania.

In LATAM, women-led police stations have been established to provide specialized services to SGBV survivors. These stations, which can be found in countries like Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, Colombia, and Costa Rica, are staffed predominantly by women and offer a range of services, including psycho-social support, childcare, rehousing programs, and awareness-raising campaigns.

To optimize the effectiveness of these strategies, several recommendations can be considered:

1. Prevention: Establish awareness-raising campaigns to educate communities about the nature of SGBV and survivors' rights. Legislative requirements for primary prevention activities, as seen in Argentina, can ensure the regular implementation of these campaigns.
2. Optimizing results: Develop and strengthen relationships with grassroots NGOs to provide robust legal aid, medical treatment, and long-term psycho-social support. Collaboration with community networks can enhance the effectiveness and consistency of support for SGBV survivors.
3. Improving logistics: Clarify roles and responsibilities among departments and agencies to streamline cooperation and service delivery. Regular audits can ensure accountability in resource allocation and infrastructure maintenance.
4. Increasing resources: Encourage alternative sources of funding to support the establishment and maintenance of SGBV care facilities, particularly in regions with limited resources.

In conclusion, WFWPI believed that, while significant progress has been made in recognizing and responding to SGBV and femicide, much work remains to be done. A concerted effort from governments, international organizations, NGOs, and communities is required to address the root causes of gendered violence and to support survivors. By implementing comprehensive strategies and fostering collaboration, it is possible to create a world where all individuals are free from the threat of SGBV and femicide.
