



Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality
The Chair

07.11.2023

Mr David McAllister
Chair
Committee on Foreign Affairs
BRUSSELS

Subject: Opinion on Human rights and democracy in the world and the European Union's policy on the matter – annual report 2023 (2023/2118(INI))

Dear Mr Chair,

Under the procedure referred to above, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality has been asked to submit an opinion to your committee. By written procedure of 13 July 2023, the committee decided to send the opinion in the form of a letter.

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality considered the matter at its meeting of 7 November¹. At that meeting, it decided to call on the Committee on Foreign Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Biedroń

¹ The following were present for the final vote: Isabella Adinolfi, Laura Ballarín Cereza, Robert Biedroń, Maria da Graça Carvalho, Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, Seán Kelly, Arba Kokalari, Alice Kuhnke, Radka Maxová, Karen Melchior, Johan Nissinen, Maria Noichl, Sirpa Pietikäinen, Samira Rafaela, Evelyn Regner, Diana Riba i Giner, Sylwia Spurek, Eleni Stavrou, Hilde Vautmans, Angelika Winzig, Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska

SUGGESTIONS

1. Condemns the continuous backsliding of human rights, including women's rights and gender equality, with women journalists, activists and human rights defenders, including SRHR defenders, being particularly under threat and consistently targeted; denounces the severe human rights violation in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover of the country, especially the policy of gender apartheid seeking to oppress women and girls' rights; condemns Iran's Parliament for passing a draconian new legislation that imposes harsher penalties on women who breach hijab rules; reiterates its unwavering support for the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran; further notes that respect for human rights is necessary for a democracy to function; reiterates its call for the full implementation of GAP III and for gender equality and women and girls empowerment policies becoming a priority in EU external relations, bilaterally and in multilateral fora; emphasizes that respect for fundamental rights and freedoms must be an indispensable part of the EU accession process; emphasizes that human rights, democracy and the rule of law are interdependent and EU values must be fully respected by all EU Member States; underlines the need for the EU to uphold fundamental rights, with a special focus on its external dimension, in order to be a trustworthy actor in European and global external relations, including for women and LGBTI people; in this regard, emphasizes that anti-gender, anti-democratic and homophobic initiatives are on the rise in Member States; stresses that LGBTI-free zones introduced in Poland in 2019, and homophobic murders in Slovakia have no place in our union and calls on populist parties within those respective Member States to respect the dignity of the individual through tolerance; notes the increasing backsliding in sexual and reproductive health and rights, which are fundamental rights, and emphasizes that the attacks on SRHR are an established tactic of anti-democratic actors to further erode rights and freedoms in the European Union and internationally;
2. Stresses that women and girls, including LGBTI persons, are more vulnerable in conflicts; condemns Russia's unprovoked and illegal war against Ukraine and its disproportionate consequences for women and girls; recognises the courage of women Ukrainian soldiers and women who provide non-combat support, making up a second line of defence on the ground; calls for Russia to be held accountable for all breaches of human rights against women and girls, including but not limited to, all accounts of gender-based violence such as sexual violence and rape; calls to ensure that all victims have access to justice;
3. Strongly condemns all forms of gender-based violence and calls for decisive action to put an end to sexual violence as a weapon of war, to protect and help victims and to increase their access to justice; notes that in line with UN SCR 1820 (2008), rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide; calls upon Member States to comply with their obligations for prosecuting persons responsible for such acts and stresses the importance of ending impunity; notes with concern the use of female genital mutilation, child and forced marriages, honour violence, 'morality policing' and trafficking of women and girls; welcomes the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention and encourages all countries in Europe to implement it; stresses the importance of identifying gender-based violence as an area of crime under Article 83(1) TFEU and

reiterates that rape on the basis of lack of consent needs to be criminalised under EU law;

4. Stresses that women and girls from ethnic, religious and belief minorities are even more vulnerable to gender-based violence and discrimination; highlights the persistent discrimination of LGBTI+ people and calls on the EU and its Member States to unequivocally condemn any stigmatisation, hate crimes and hate speech, persecution, so called “conversion therapies”, intersex genital mutilation, corrective rape and all forms of violence;
5. Stresses that SRHR are human rights and must be upheld by EU Member States, in line with international human rights standards, and is deeply concerned about global backsliding on gender equality and SRHR, including in the EU; condemns the decision of October 2020 of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal and the decision of the Hungarian Government to force those seeking abortion to listen to a foetal heartbeat and calls for their immediate reversal; emphasizes the importance of setting a leading example and reiterates its calls to enshrine the right to legal and safe abortion in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; calls on the EU to prioritize access to SRHR as part of the promotion of human rights and achievement of the sustainable development goals; calls for support for human rights defenders and civil society organisations engaged in promoting and facilitating access to SRHR, whose work is threatened by shrinking civil society space; highlights the need for a gender sensitive humanitarian aid so that it can reach those most vulnerable in need; calls for universal access to SRHR services, and for accessibility of SRHR health centres in particular, including comprehensive family planning, contraception and unbiased information, antenatal, childbirth and postnatal care, as well as HIV care, including PEP/PREP medication; reaffirms that the denial of quality comprehensive sexual and reproductive health, rights and services is a form of gender-based violence; emphasizes that women and girls need continued access to sexual and reproductive health services throughout conflict and displacement, including access to safe delivery, family planning services, legal and safe abortion or the clinical management of rape; calls for funds to be made available for the provision of essential and life-saving sexual and reproductive health services, in line with the UN Minimum Initial Services Package; condemns other continued attempts to stigmatise and reduce access to sexual and reproductive healthcare; condemns all threats, attacks and punishments of activists helping women to access contraception or abortion, such as the condemnation of Justyna Wydrzynska in Poland in March 2023;
6. Highlights the importance of ensuring access to quality education for girls and ensuring equal opportunities, as a precondition of women’s empowerment and full enjoyment of their rights; reiterates the importance of age-appropriate, evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education, both within and beyond the EU, to eradicate gender stereotypes and harmful societal norms; notes that comprehensive education, including but not limited to scientific education such as STEM subjects, is important for obtaining skills, decent work and the jobs of the future, as well as for breaking down gender stereotypes and biases.

**ANNEX: LIST OF ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

The following list is drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur. The rapporteur has received input from the following entities or persons in the preparation of the opinion, until the adoption thereof in committee:

Entity and/or person
The rapporteur declares that she did not receive input from any entity or person.
Rapporteur: Arba Kokalari