



17.4.2024

## MISSION REPORT

following the mission to the United States of the America: 68<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Statues of Women, New York, 18-22 March 2024

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Members of the mission:

Robert Biedroń	(S&D) (Chair)
Frances Fitzgerald	(PPE)
Arba Kokalari	(PPE)
Evelyn Regner	(S&D)
Vera Tax	(S&D)
Samira Rafaela	(Renew)
Monika Vana	(Verts/ALE)

## *Introduction*

In the framework of the draft programme for travel by committee ad hoc delegations outside the European Union for the first half of 2024, the Conference of Presidents, at its meeting of 4 October 2023, authorised the sending of a seven Member ad hoc delegation, including the FEMM Chair, to New York, United States of the America (US).

The mission took place on 18-22 March 2024.

## *Context*

The delegation went to take part in the 68th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (the CSW68), focused on ‘Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective’ as well as to participate in side-events, briefings with the EU Ambassador, EU and international partners and non-governmental organisations.

## *Summary account of meetings*

### **Monday, 18 March 2024, 17.00-18.00**

#### **Briefing to the Members of the FEMM Committee Delegation by H.E. Mr Stavros Lambrinidis, Ambassador, Head of EU Delegation to the UN in New York.**

Also present: Mr Klemen Zumer, First Councillor at the EU Delegation

**Members of the delegation** in their introductory remarks presented the most relevant documents adopted by the European Parliament (EP) in this mandate in the area of gender equality and women’s rights, such as Women on boards, Pay transparency, Equality bodies, Anti-trafficking and Combating violence against women and domestic violence directives and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. They highlighted that there is no democracy without women, and expressed their concerns about misogynous actions and messaging that go hand in hand with anti-democratic and anti-rights movements and dynamics. These in turn can infiltrate strategic thinking and law-making. The parliamentarians exchanged on the type of foresights and strategies that can be implemented to counter these authoritative trends, and defend democracy and multilateralism. They expressed their interest in the progress of the ongoing CSW negotiations state of play.

**Ambassador H.E. Mr Stavros Lambrinidis** started his briefing by underlining the fundamental problems with women’s poverty - the priority theme of CSW68 - and where the EU and international partners can make the biggest impact. He stressed that most country representatives meeting at CSW every year value multilateralism, providing a unique opportunity to find compromises and new ways to cooperate together. The EU mainly had the task to bridge gaps between members in the negotiating team with diverging positions. The Ambassador stressed that one added value of the EP delegation at the CSW was that they should focus their messaging and advocacy on ‘why’ women’s rights and women’s economic

empowerment is so important to Europeans and highlight lessons learnt from each EU Member State. Every single gender issue can be connected to poverty, but we must look more closely. Poverty of women stems from a range of interrelated factors, including their often precarious position in the labour market, due to a strong educational and occupational gender segregation derived from traditional stereotypes and bias.

An important upcoming milestone, that will require preparation, is the UN Summit for the Future next September 2024.

**Monday, 18 March 2024, 18.30-19.00**

**Meeting with Mr António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations**

Also present: Mr Earle Courtenay Rattray, Chef of Cabinet, Executive Office of the Secretary-General

**Members of the delegation** in their introductory remarks highlighted a number of initiatives adopted in the current legislative term in the area of gender equality and women's rights. The Chair of the FEMM delegation mentioned for example, the Women on boards, Pay transparency, Equality bodies, Anti-trafficking and Combating violence against women and domestic violence directives and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. He stressed that women suffer more than men from crisis-driven budget and social spending cuts, which must be offset by investing in job training and female entrepreneurship. Parliamentarians pointed out that cuts in education, childcare and care services can push women to work shorter hours or part-time, thereby reducing not only their income but their pensions as well. In Europe, older women in particular and single mothers are especially at risk of falling into poverty. Older women suffer from higher levels of poverty than older men in both developed and developing countries. Furthermore, single mothers are at a much higher risk of being deprived of acceptable housing and living conditions than other family types.

**Mr António Guterres** stressed that poverty has a female face. An agenda on gender equality aimed at reducing women's poverty, including in old age, should promote women's labour market participation and decent work, ease their care burden and improve women's pension coverage as well as pension adequacy. The UN Secretary-General also highlighted the importance of artificial intelligence (AI) across industries, and how AI is a heavily male-dominated area at the moment feeding off male dominated and gender-biased data. This is significant because AI will continue to play a crucial role in our lives, but as a male driven sector, it may reinforce harmful stereotypes and create unfavourable dynamics that make it even more difficult for women to excel. He also gave the example of banking algorithms that even when women are stronger earners than men, they may receive less favourable loans or credit cards with lower limits. Trends like this one must be countered and eradicated. Mr Guterres also spoke about how in the UN, gender parity was achieved at senior management since 2018, which has also been maintained year after year, and not been reversed. The UN Secretary-General exchanged with the parliamentarians also on the importance of education in abolishing poverty given that educated girls are more likely to grow into women that participate in the formal labour market and earn higher incomes.

**Tuesday, 19 March 2024, 10.00-11.00**

**Meeting with Ms Paddy TORSNEY, Permanent Observer to the United Nations of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**

Also present: Mr. Alessandro Motter, Senior Advisor - Economic and Social Affairs

**Members of the delegation** in their introductory remarks spoke about the legislative achievements of the FEMM Committee in the current parliamentary term, which is concluding in a few months, with elections taking place in May 2024. The Chair of the FEMM delegation highlighted that globally, more voters than ever in history will head to the polls as the European Union plus at least 65 countries around the world will vote in 2024. He noted that elections are no guarantee of democracy. But it is also true that democracy does not exist without elections, which is why 2024 carries such significance. The parliamentarians discussed how the sheer number of elections takes on a different meaning in the current context in which so many leaders or political parties lead with antidemocratic rhetoric and actions. In view of the upcoming elections, the Parliamentarians, especially the women politicians, also mentioned their own experience with cyber bullying and online harassment. The Chair of the FEMM delegation also mentioned the role of the European Parliament in relations with the United Nations, and how it is time that this important relationship evolves in order to increase the added value of the EP to functional commissions of the UN such as the Commission on the Status of Women. The Parliamentarians also exchanged on the topic of gender equality in parliaments around the world, noting that in the EP for the current term, representation of women was 39.3%, which is the best proportion the EP has ever had. They indicated that this proportion should increase or at least be maintained.

**Ms Paddy TORSNEY** mentioned that IPU regularly publishes rankings of the percentage of women in national parliaments, and spoke about the work of the IPU aiming to increase women's representation in parliaments and empower women MPs. The work of IPU focuses on three main objectives: (i) increase the number of women in parliament through well-designed quotas and parliamentary caucuses; (ii) support women in parliament; and (iii) transform parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions that deliver on women's rights. Ms Torsney also spoke about landmark reports published by IPU on sexism and gender-based violence in parliament, looking at both female MPs and female parliamentary staff. Following escalating violence, threats and harassment against women politicians at all levels, IPU also developed a set of guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament, available in several languages. She highlighted that first, the political will of the parliament's leadership should be mobilized against tolerating any sexism, harassment or violence against women in parliament. Ms Torsney also spoke about the importance of bringing a parliamentary voice to UN mechanisms or treaties, which is also part of IPU's role, given that IPU has Permanent Observer Status with the UN since 2002. It is important that the work of the UN is informed by the views of parliamentarians, as representatives of the people, but the legislative dimension is also key for the implementation of UN agreements. The topic of anti-rights and antidemocratic movements was also mentioned, including the divide between conservative young men and progressive young women. She also referred to the upcoming Summit of the Future.

**Tuesday, 19 March 2024, 11.30-12.45**

**EP Side Event: “Promoting women's full inclusion in economy and labour market to address poverty: closing the gender gaps and empowering through rights”**

This side event focused on measures to ensure women’s equal participation in labour markets, transparent recruitment procedures in companies or pay transparency, equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, access to decent work opportunities as well as recognising the link between undervalued and underpaid work in female dominated sectors. It also looked at why women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty and the risks of social exclusion they face, in particular those who experience intersectional forms of discrimination.

The side event was divided in two panels. Panel I: Overcoming the gender pay gap and gender pension gap, including by means of pay transparency and tackling the challenges in female dominated sectors. Panel II: Aspects behind women's poverty and means to address them: tools to address gender inequalities and rights based approach to tackle poverty.

Opening remarks were delivered by Mr Robert BIEDRON, Chair of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee, European Parliament and the key note speech by Dr. Jemimah NJUKI, Chief Economic Empowerment, UN Women.

The two panels of the side event included interventions of Members of the FEMM Committee. The first panel was moderated by Ms Frances FITZGERALD and included interventions by Ms Samira RAFAELA and Ms Evelyn REGNER, Vice-President, European Parliament. The second panel was moderated by Ms Monika VANA and included interventions by Ms Arba KOKALARI and Ms Vera TAX.

The first panel called on overcoming the gender pay gap and pension gap, including through pay transparency while the second panel looked at aspects behind women’s poverty and means to address them, as well as tools to tackle gender inequalities. Delegates from all parts of the world engaged in the debate that followed each panel.

The Chair of the FEMM delegation stressed in his concluding remarks that focusing on women's economic empowerment alone will not automatically lead to enhanced gender equality. There is a need to also address wider elements of power imbalances in society and look into the root causes of inequalities and of women’s poverty.

**Tuesday, 19 March 2024, 13.15-13.45**

**Meeting with Ms Hanne Carle, Head of the CSW negotiations team, Political Officer in the Human Rights and Social Affairs Section at the EU Delegation**

**Members of the delegation** highlighted the role of the EP in relations with the United Nations, and how important it is that the EP is sufficiently informed throughout all stages of the negotiation of the conclusions of the CSW68. The Members inquired how the EP can be further involved with Member States. The Chair of the FEMM delegation presented the EP resolution of 8 February 2024 on the EU priorities for the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which the Head of the CSW negotiations team had no information on up to this point. The Parliament strongly believes that the EU needs to show strong leadership and take a unified position to ensure equal opportunities for all women and girls in all their diversity,

in education, in the labour market, as well as in political and economic decision-making, with equal access to economic and financial services.

**Ms Hanne Carle** presented the approach of the facilitator of the negotiations on the conclusions of the CSW68 and the timeline of the negotiations. She also gave a brief update on the main topics under discussion in the last week of negotiations, and underlined that text on issues such as economic violence is disputed and will be challenging throughout the negotiations.

**Tuesday, 19 March 2024, 14.00-14.45**

**Meeting with Ms Kitty van der Heijden, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships**

Also present:

- Manuel Fontaine, Special Adviser, Child Rights
- Lauren Rumble, Associate Director, Gender Equality
- Omar Robles, Programme Specialist, Gender Equality
- Natalia Winder-Rossi, Director, Social Policy
- Tasha Gill, Senior Adviser, Child Protection
- Leona Barusya, Public Partnerships Specialist

**Members of the delegation** in their introductory remarks highlighted a number of initiatives adopted in the current legislative term in the area of gender equality and women's rights. The Chair of the FEMM delegation mentioned for example, the Women on boards, Pay transparency, Equality bodies, Anti-trafficking and Combating violence against women and domestic violence directives and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, as well as legislative measures on combating child sexual abuse. The Parliamentarians brought up the humanitarian crises around the world that are hardest on women and children. They asked about the alarming situation regarding the thousands of missing Ukrainian children that have been deported and forcibly displaced from their homes to Russia and Russian-occupied territories since the invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022.

**Ms Kitty van der Heijden** spoke about the importance of embedding solid protection against gender-based violence across all initiatives. In addition, she highlighted that teenage girls are a segment of the population that needs specific attention because they are usually not covered by initiatives aimed at women nor by those aimed at children. Initiatives aimed at teenage girls should focus on empowering them, building their resilience, include comprehensive sexuality education, and seek to break the inter-generational life-cycle of gender disadvantage. Ms van der Heijden called on the European Parliament to adopt dedicated initiatives to teenage girls. She reminded that the SDGs reaffirm the importance of investing in adolescents and emphasize their role as agents of positive change. Regarding humanitarian crises around the world, Ms van der Heijden stressed that UNICEF has piloted different programmes through partnerships, and scaled the ones that were successful. However, access to war and conflict regions or in the case of Ukrainian children, access to the displaced children held in Russia, is crucial in order to provide support, while addressing as well the issue of gender based violence.

**Tuesday, 19 March 2024, 15.00-16.00**

**Meeting with Mr. Walid Badawi, Deputy Director and Officer-in-Charge of the Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy, UNDP, together with Ms. Raquel Lagunas, UNDP Head of Gender**

**Members of the delegation** highlighted a number of relevant initiatives adopted in the current legislative term such as the Women on boards, Pay transparency, Equality bodies, Anti-trafficking and Combating violence against women and domestic violence directives and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. The Chair of the FEMM delegation presented the EP resolution of 8 February 2024 on the EU priorities for the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which highlights that the EU should ensure equal opportunities for all women and girls in all their diversity, in education, in the labour market, as well as in political and economic decision-making, with equal access to economic and financial services.

**Mr. Walid Badawi and Ms. Raquel Lagunas** stressed that multiple crises and risks are threatening the world and this context is exacerbating the alarming backlash against women's rights and gender equality that we are witnessing. Given the theme of CSW68, Mr Badawi and Ms Lagunas pointed out that since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, women have been nearly twice as likely to lose their jobs compared to men. Yet less than 20% of policy measures implemented by countries across the world addressed women's economic insecurity. They mentioned the UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025, which is grounded in UNDP's commitment to eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities and exclusion, and supporting the empowerment of all women. In the context of gender equality, they noted that one of the most important elements of gender equality that is largely unimplemented remains gender budgeting. They urged that more partnerships around gender budgeting are needed, and the private sector including banks should be involved. Lastly, they stressed that the ongoing trend of political polarization could take a toll on funding of development programmes, and on core resources. They observed that as defence spending is going up, humanitarian funds tend to go down. They stressed the importance of the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative.

**Tuesday, 19 March 2024, 17.00-18.30**

**Meeting between FEMM Delegation and NGOs**

After the introductory remarks of the Chair of the FEMM delegation, the representative of the NGOs shared their comments.

**Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD)** spoke about their work with communities discriminated based on work and descent, which are some of the most excluded, segregated, and marginalized groups. Women with stigma attached to their identity suffer unjust deprivation and systematic exclusion from education, health, access to water and sanitation, employment, voting rights, equal access to land and housing, and access to religious institutions in the public sphere. **OXFAM International** cautioned against the dysfunctional partnership between some big businesses and governments that end up isolating communities who lose their rights, for example in mining communities. It is mainly women human rights defenders that are pushing back, and that need protection against violence. **Women in Migration Network** stressed that migration is a feminist issue and a gender equality issue, and mentioned the issue of the "firewall" regarding transmission of information on undocumented victims to the authorities. "Firewalls" are built on the premise that while

authorities have the prerogative to enforce immigration laws, they also have to protect fundamental rights and a “firewall” allows undocumented victims access to needed services before the enforcement of immigration rules. **International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW)**, among other NGO representatives, stressed the backlash against rights, especially SRHR, and the importance of SRHR for example in terms of decreasing child marriage and teenage pregnancies and preventing sexually transmitted infections.

**Women’s Major Group** talked about their work on intersectionality, highlighting the need to work on different social causes together. They also cautioned that anti-gender groups are receiving money from Russia and the USA, but also from EU public funds - they called on the EP to scrutinize public funds to a greater extent in order to fund democratic organisations and programmes, not anti-rights ones. They believe that denial of access to abortion is an EU competency and called on the EP to continue to protect SRHR and SRHR defenders. **ATD Fourth World** also mentioned intersectionality and the link with multidimensional poverty. They drew attention to institutional maltreatment as a dimension of poverty - focusing on the person as the problem or why they are poor, linked to generational poverty. **European Women’s Lobby (EWL)** called attention to energy poverty. Single mothers, elderly women and women that live alone are especially vulnerable. **National Democratic Institute** spoke about financing in terms of debt relief for women and looking at how debt is accrued by women, especially given the practice of opaque loan contracts. Gender disinformation is closely related to debt participation. **Ipas** called on the EP to continue pushing back on the pushbacks against LGTIQ+ rights, and to continue supporting rights defends and NGOs that work in this area. **Actionaid.org** cautioned that there is increasing resistance to gendered approaches or programmes. Backlash and resistance to gender equality take common forms that need to be countered, including denial of problems and of responsibility, inaction, superficial appeasement, co-option, and repression. **Women at the table** emphasised that AI and algorithms will continue to be decisive tools in the next century and called on the EP to ensure that algorithms are inclusive, and that women are not bystanders in how AI will shape our society. All have a right to consent and contest when it comes to AI shaped tools and to algorithms. **Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF)** stressed that climate change is an inequality multiplier and a driver of poverty, which needs more attention at the political level. They also stressed that in the context of climate change, financing to NGOs needs to reach local women farmers that are increasingly having to compete for land and resources while facing violence.

**Members of the delegation** responded to the comments and topics shared by the NGOs by highlighting different initiatives already adopted by the EP or with initiatives and areas that require further work and development. The Chair of the FEMM delegation talked about upcoming elections and the escalating anti-rights and anti-democratic movements in politics alongside the increasing incitement to hatred, and cyber harassment and violence against women politicians that is already at all-time high levels, yet still increasing. Other members also highlighted the need for strong and coordinated responses to the backlash against democracy closely connected to anti-gender or anti-rights movements. Members also stressed that there is no climate justice without social justice and without gender justice. Menstrual and hormonal health issues affecting participation of women in the labour market was also discussed.



**Wednesday, 20 March 2024, 09.00-10.00**

**Meeting with Ms Reem ALSALEM, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences**

**Ms Reem Alsalem** emphasized that the picture remains grim in terms of the rights of women and girls, especially in the context of violence. There is a blatant disregard of women's rights and dignity in conflict, and women suffer in all parts of the world where there is hostility, including in Sudan, in Haiti and in Gaza. Sexual violence is more and more used as a tool of war and as targeted persecution. It is deliberately done on a large scale in order to dominate and subjugate the community that is under attack. More accountability is needed on the side of Western countries and the EU because diplomatic relations continue with perpetrators without accountability. Also, arms deals continue without accountability. Ms Alsalem cautioned that Gambia is discussing decriminalizing female genital mutilation (FGM), as the first country to take such a step to reverse the progress made in this area. Ms Alsalem mentioned that she will publish a report on prostitution in June 2024, and she emphasised the issue with depicting prostitution as any other work without illustrating the extreme violence that comes with prostitution. She stressed that the way we deal with prostitution and pornography will go a long way to prevention of violence. We cannot say that we are ok for one gender to be sold and bought. She takes no stance on surrogacy at the moment.

**Members of the delegation** talked about progress on the Istanbul Convention and on the Combating violence against women and domestic violence directive, where the EP seeks to be ambitious on all gendered criminal conduct and criminal acts namely female genital mutilation, forced marriage, the non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material, cyber stalking, cyber harassment, cyber flashing, and cyber incitement to violence or hatred, but also femicide, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, stalking, and others. The EP has especially worked to progress on specific prevention measures to prevent rape and on the promotion of the central role of consent in sexual relationships. The Istanbul Convention requires the criminalisation of rape based on lack of consent, and the EP was a strong proponent to mirroring this in the Combating violence against women and domestic violence directive. The Chair of the FEMM delegation spoke about the attacks against women in politics and women human rights defenders, especially in view of the upcoming EP elections. Other Members talked about the backlash on women's rights and the different trends in politics and society at large undermining women and girls. Erasure of data based on sex was also discussed, which has deep implications because pushing for gender neutral services can mean eliminating specialist services for women and girls and turning services to male-neutral services. It is another way to inflict co-option. As for the issue of Gambia and FGM, they stressed the need for joint action both at EU and UN level.

**Wednesday, 20 March 2024, 10.30-11.00**

**Meeting with Mr. Māris Burbergs (Latvia), Vice-Chair (Eastern European States Group) of the Bureau for the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**Members of the delegation** highlighted the role of the EP in relations with the United Nations, and how important it is that the EP is sufficiently informed throughout all stages of the negotiation of the conclusions of the CSW68. The Chair of the FEMM delegation presented the EP resolution of 8 February 2024 on the EU priorities for the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

**Mr. Māris Burbergs** gave an overview of the procedures, division of roles and negotiations on the conclusions of the CSW68. He also gave a brief update on the current topics under discussion in the last week of negotiations and the main challenges that are expected to still come up before the negotiations are to be concluded.

**Wednesday, 20 March 2024, 13.30-14.45**

**Meeting with EU Member States Delegates to the CSW68**

**Members of the delegation** outlined the most relevant documents adopted by the EP in the current legislative term, in the area of gender equality and women's rights, including Women on boards, Pay transparency, Equality bodies, Anti-trafficking and Combating violence against women and domestic violence directives and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. The Chair of the FEMM delegation called for more coordination between the EP and Member States on gender equality topics at the UN and especially on the negotiation of the conclusions of the CSW every year.

**EU Member States Delegates** talked about several topics in the area of gender equality including advancing on gender budgeting, violence against women and girls, anti-rights movements, SRHR, rights of LGTIQ+, maternity and paternity leave and equal involvement of men and women as caregivers. Some issues such as surrogacy were mentioned. The EU and many EU Member States do not have a position on surrogacy, but it is discussed at the UN and in other multilateral fora. However, the EU is not active in those discussions because of lack of legal clarity. If the EU would take a unified position on surrogacy, it could help Member States to do the same, and ensure that the EU does not miss out of relevant debates in the multilateral fora.

**Thursday, 21 March 2024, 09.00-09.30**

**Meeting with Ms Ilze BRANDS KEHRIS, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, head of the UN Human Rights Office in New York**

**Members of the delegation** highlighted a number of initiatives adopted in the current legislative term in the area of gender equality and women's rights. The Chair of the FEMM delegation presented the EP resolution of 8 February 2024 on the EU priorities for the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The Members shared their concerns regarding increasing human rights violations, especially violence against women rights defenders, and the disproportionate high risk of harassment faced by women running for political office.

**Ms Ilze BRANDS KEHRIS** stressed that impunity for those responsible for acts amounting to serious human rights violations inflicts additional suffering on victims, and perpetuates a cycle of further violations. Impunity remains high. She called for a zero-tolerance to such impunity, and emphasized the need for international cooperation and partnerships to put an end to impunity. She also stressed that there is an increased need for investigations of human rights violations all over the world, signalling an alarming trend. There are egregious human rights violations under international law all throughout the world, including unlawful killings and murder, unnecessary and disproportionate use of force, arbitrary deprivation of liberty, torture,

rape, sexual harassment and intimidation, enforced disappearances and gender persecution intersected with discrimination based on ethnicity and religion.

**Thursday, 21 March 2024, 11.00-11.45**

**Meeting with Mr Tonderai CHIKUHWA, Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Adviser, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict**

**Members of the delegation** conveyed deep concern about the horrific reports of mass sexual violence committed around the world surrounding conflict and war areas as well as reports of ongoing acts of gender-based violence. Members discussed the need for all credible allegations to be investigated and steps taken, as appropriate, to hold accountable those responsible. They stressed that impunity has gone on for far too long, and expressed full support for bringing perpetrators to justice. Members also cautioned with grave concern that sexual violence as a weapon of war is also used in Europe. Russia and its allies in Ukraine have used sexual violence and torture techniques even before the recent invasion, specifically, during the fighting in Eastern Ukraine between the Ukrainian military and Russia-backed separatists that broke out in 2014 in the wake of Russia's annexation of Crimea. Members emphasized steps taken to promote accountability for sexual violence such as the European Parliament resolution of 5 May 2022 on the impact of the war against Ukraine on women, but also measures included in the framework of Combating violence against women and domestic violence directive and the Istanbul Convention.

**Mr Tonderai CHIKUHWA** detailed the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and stressed that conflict-related sexual violence has devastating effects on individuals and communities, undermines peace and security, and prevents inclusive and sustainable development. Yet sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war since the beginning of the world, and in addition rape is also prevalent as a byproduct of armed conflict. Mr Chikuhwa also highlighted that impunity for sexual violence during wartime remains widespread, with accountability and justice the rare exception. He estimated that for each rape reported in connection with a conflict, 10 to 20 cases go undocumented, in part due to the impunity of perpetrators. He mentioned ongoing work on better profiling perpetrators. In terms of prevention, he noted that gender equity needs to be promoted and advanced globally, and harmful societal gender norms need to be eradicated. He also insisted that prioritizing prevention measures and locally-driven responses to all forms of gender-based violence is crucial for prevention of sexual violence during conflicts. He referred to the UN related mission and follow-up report to Israel, following the attack of the 7th October 2023.

**Thursday, 21 March 2024, 11.00-11.45**

**Meeting with Ms Sima Sami BAHOUS, UN Women Executive Director**

Also present:

- Daniel Seymour, Director Strategic Partnerships Division
- Julie Ballington, Policy Adviser
- Abigail Neville, Deputy Chief of Public Sector Partnerships Section
- Xiaoman Zhang, Public Sector Partnerships Section

**Ms Sima Sami BAHOUS** emphasized the importance of gender mainstreaming in the context

of ongoing work in gender equality and the need to feed in the conclusions in the Beijing + 30 meeting and documents. If gender equality worldwide is the overarching and long-term goal, then gender mainstreaming can be understood as the strategic approach as well as technical and institutional process that will help achieve that goal. It is through gender mainstreaming that we can better transform discriminatory social institutions, laws, cultural norms and community practices, such as those limiting women's access to property rights or restricting their access to public space. She believes that all UN activities and processes need to incorporate a gender lens. She stressed that progress on the Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender equality needs to speed up. With only seven years remaining, a mere 15.4% of Goal 5 indicators with data are considered to be "on track".

**Members of the delegation** detailed the most relevant legislative initiatives adopted by the EP in the current term in the area of gender equality and women's rights. The current legislative term of the EP has been the most active in terms of adopting legislation with a clear gender lens. The Chair of the FEMM delegation talked about gender-based violence and concerns regarding upcoming elections and increasing representation of women in the EP for the next legislative term. Members discussed backlash against women's rights, especially SRHR and the anti-rights and anti-democratic movements around the world, which are often ignited and maintained by polarized political actors. The delegation suggested the active participation of UN Women in the next EU Gender equality week 2024 in Brussels, which was highly welcomed by Ms Bahous.

### **Conclusion**

The priorities and concerns of the EU and the UN are the same in the area of gender equality and women's rights. Worldwide backlash against SRHR as well as anti-rights and anti-democratic movements are slowing down progress on gender equality, and in some places around the world they are even backtracking on progress already made. In this context, women are suffering in poverty, their lives impacted by violence and war. It is more important than ever that the EU leads by example pushing back on the backlash and anti-rights movements while pursuing to achieve gender equality, especially in the face of ongoing crises, increasing poverty and inequalities, and escalating armed conflicts.

On the theme of CSW68, it is clear that work on women's poverty, on gender-based violence, on gender equality in connection to taxation policies, on the common European action on care, on gender budgeting, on pay transparency, and on the gender aspects of the rising cost of living and the impact of the energy crisis needs to continue. The Parliament strongly believes that we must ensure that the EU shows strong leadership and takes a unified position to ensure equal opportunities in education, in the labour market, as well as in political and economic decision-making, with equal access to economic and financial services. It is also important to apply gender mainstreaming as well as gender budgeting in all policy areas as these are globally acknowledged tools to implement women's rights and reach gender equality.