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Gender equality and gender backlash

Guidance document of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Summary

The term “gender” was originally conceptualized to explain and challenge the systematic oppression of women. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, gender was considered one of the key concepts in international human rights. Now, transnational movements opposing “gender ideology” have gained ground, including among conservative religious, civil society and State actors. The Working Group has observed backlash against women’s rights and the very concept of gender and gender equality in recent years. This backlash puts many of the hard-fought gains that women have achieved in jeopardy, particularly in the areas of sexuality and reproduction and gender-equality education and even with regard to gender-based violence.

In the context of the increasing misuse of the concept of gender, and attacks on gender equality and women’s rights, the Working Group considers it important to clarify the use of the concept of gender in relation to its mandate. In the present guidance document, prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 15/23, 41/6 and 50/18, the Working Group also addresses current challenges to women’s and girls’ rights, in particular attacks by fundamentalist movements, and highlights the need to reaffirm women’s and girl’s human rights and substantive gender equality globally.



I. Introduction

1. The present guidance document is an edited version of a 2020 position paper issued by the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls; it does not reflect the most recent updates in the area of gender equality and gender backlash. Updates will be included and the theme will be further developed in upcoming guidance documents on substantive gender equality and on women and girls in the family.

2. As laid out in detail in its 2018 thematic report, in which the Working Group focused on the theme of reasserting equality and countering rollbacks, there has been a significant backlash in recent years against women's rights and the use of the term "gender".¹ The term "gender" was originally conceptualized to explain and challenge the systematic oppression of women. Following the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, held in Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995, the term was considered one of the key concepts in international human rights. Now, almost 30 years later, not only has the use of the term "gender" been attacked as imposing "gender ideology", many of the hard-won victories for women, particularly in the areas of sexuality and reproduction, gender-sensitive education and even gender-based violence, are at risk. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and measures taken by some States in response only worsened the situation.²

3. In the context of the increasing misuse of the concept of gender, and attacks on gender (equality) and women's rights, the Working Group considers it important to take stock of these developments, to counter the anti-gender attacks and to clarify the use of the concept in relation to its mandate. The concept of gender is of fundamental importance to the Working Group as a special procedure mechanism mandated to work on the elimination of discrimination against women and girls.

II. Concept of gender in feminism and human rights

4. The concept of gender first appeared in feminist writings in the 1970s to challenge the then dominant position of biological determinism, which had naturalized women's inequality as arising from the biological difference between women and men.³ Feminist theorists developed the concept to point to the social construction of gender inequality and the relational aspect of the meaning of femininity and masculinity. By emphasizing the social construction of women's inequality, feminist theorists and activists from around the world called for political action to change this inequality.

5. There were different feminist understandings of the term,⁴ but the dominant approach defined gender as referring to social norms, roles and expectations for women and men, as distinct from the term "sex", which referred to the biological difference between them.⁵ While women of different social identities and socioeconomic backgrounds were part of the

¹ A/HRC/38/46, para. 14. For a detailed review of the use of the term "gender" in international law and the rise of anti-gender movements, see Marija Antić and Ivana Radačić, "The evolving understanding of gender in international law and 'gender ideology' pushback 25 years since the Beijing conference on women", *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 83 (November–December 2020).

² Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, "Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic must not discount women and girls" (20 April 2020).

³ Although the connected ideas of sexual roles and psychological traits were being discussed in the late 1940s, the concept of gender in feminist writings appears for the first time in Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (New York, Doubleday, 1970) and Ann Oakley's *Sex, Gender and Society* (London, Temple Smith, 1972).

⁴ There are different ideas of what we term as gender in the different societies, but examining those different ideas is beyond the scope of the present document. For more on this, see, for example, <http://www.gendertrust.org.uk/gender-concepts-around-the-world/>.

⁵ For a discussion of the main theories, see R.W. Connell, "Theorising gender", *Sociology*, vol. 19, No. 2 (May 1985), pp. 260–272.

feminist movement since its beginning,⁶ it was in the 1990s that the intersectionality perspective, which calls for an intersectional analysis of multiple interlocking dimensions of oppression, such as sex, gender, class, race, sexuality, ethnicity and disability, was fully established as an important tool for analysis of discrimination. The coining of the term “intersectionality” helped clarify that women’s social identities profoundly influence how each woman experiences gender.⁷ In addition, in the 1990s, the term “gender” started being used in queer theory, with such theorists challenging (what they perceived as) the binary understanding of gender, the sex/gender dichotomy and the heteronormative assumptions of some feminist approaches.⁸

6. On the insistence of feminist activists in the 1990s, the term “gender” began to be used in international human rights law. In 1992, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women used the phrase “gender-based violence” in its general recommendation No. 19 (1992) on violence against women. With respect to multilateral documents, the term “gender” was first included in the Vienna Declaration and Programme for Action (1993), and then a year later in the report of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action held in Cairo from 5 to 13 September 1994, but was not defined.⁹ In the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the term “gender” was used over 200 times, but only after States agreed upon a statement in which they declared that the term “was intended to be interpreted and understood as it was in ordinary, generally accepted usage”.¹⁰ There was a significant opposition to the term, led by the Holy See, which argued that gender was “grounded in biological sexual identity, male or female”.¹¹

7. Following the Fourth World Conference on Women, in 1995, an expert group meeting was convened by the newly established Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to help clarify the use of the term “gender” with respect to women’s human rights. The term was defined as referring to “the ways in which roles, attitudes, values and relationships regarding women and men are constructed by all societies all over the world”.¹² The expert group explained that “historically, different cultures construct gender in different ways so that women’s roles, the value that their society places on those roles, and the relationship with men’s roles may vary considerably over time and from one setting to another”.¹³

⁶ For an account of the engagement of women’s movements with the United Nations, see Alda Facio, “Women’s human rights on the world stage: an unfinished history”, *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 33, Nos. 1 and 2 (2018–2019), pp. 6–18.

⁷ The term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in an effort to point at the “multidimensionality of Black women’s experience”, which a single-axis analysis could not comprehend. (Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics”, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, No. 1, pp. 139–167).

⁸ Queer theory introduced the notions of “gender performativity”, “gender fluidity” and “gender as a spectrum”. The notion of gender performativity challenges the static conception of gender, proposing the idea of gender construction through stylized repetition of acts. The notion of gender fluidity denotes the “unstability” of gender identity, and envisioning gender as a spectrum allows the inclusion of different non-conforming “performances” of gender that are often subsumed under the umbrella terms “non-binary” or “genderqueer”. (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, Routledge, 1990); Sandy Stone, “The ‘Empire’ strikes back: a posttranssexual manifesto” (1987); Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The five sexes: why male and female are not enough”, *The Sciences* (March/April 1993), pp. 20–25.

⁹ A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1.

¹⁰ A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1, annex IV, para. 3.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 162. See also Doris E. Buss, “Robes, relics and rights: the Vatican and the Beijing Conference on Women”, *Social & Legal Studies*, vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 339–363 (September 1998).

¹² E/CN.4/1996/105, para. 13.

¹³ Ibid.

8. However, in multilateral forums, opposition to such (social constructionist) conceptualization continued.¹⁴ It was only in 2011 that the term was finally explicitly defined in an international human rights instrument, in line with the feminist social constructionist approach. Viewing gender as an important concept in addressing gender-based violence, the Council of Europe, in article 3 of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention), defined it as “the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men”.

9. While this is the first such definition in a legally binding international instrument, similar definitions had already been used in international human rights law. For example, in 2010, when interpreting sex discrimination to include gender discrimination, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women defined the term as referring to “socially constructed identities, attributes and roles for women and men and society’s social and cultural meaning for these biological differences resulting in hierarchical relationships between women and men and in the distribution of power and rights favouring men and disadvantaging women”.¹⁵

10. Despite the fact that this understanding of gender was not new, its definition in the Istanbul Convention was one of the primal points of contestation by anti-gender movements. Another point of contestation of the Istanbul Convention was its explicit reference, in article 4 (3), to the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of “gender identity”, which at the time of the adoption of the Convention had already been recognized as a prohibited ground.¹⁶ In 2011, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 17/19, its first on sexual orientation and gender identity, and in 2016 it established the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.¹⁷

11. While the term “gender identity” has not yet been defined in any legally binding treaty, in the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (2006), it was defined as “each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms”.¹⁸

12. Similarly, the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity explained in the first report to the Human Rights Council under the mandate that the term “gender identity” referred to “how a person self-identifies in regard to his or her own gender, which may be different from the gender assigned at birth”.¹⁹

13. In feminist theorizing, the term “gender” has predominantly been used to point to the social structures and norms that produce the unequal position of women (as a group). Gender has also been conceptualized as a continuum of individual expression and experience and, especially in transgender theories, emphasis has been placed on the internal experience of

¹⁴ In article 7 (3) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, for example, “gender” is defined as referring to “the two sexes, male and female, within the context of society”; this definition was replicated in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

¹⁵ General recommendation No. 28 (2010), para. 5.

¹⁶ Dominic McGoldrick, “The development and status of sexual orientation discrimination under international human rights law”, *Human Rights Law Review*, vol. 16, No. 4 (December 2016), pp. 613–668.

¹⁷ See Council resolution 32/2.

¹⁸ The update to the Principles, known as the Yogyakarta Principles plus 10, included definitions of two additional concepts. “Gender expression” is defined as “each person’s presentation of the person’s gender through physical appearance – including dress, hairstyles, accessories, cosmetics – and mannerisms, speech, behavioural patterns, names and personal references”, which “may or may not conform to a person’s gender identity”. “Sex characteristics” are defined as “each person’s physical features relating to sex, including genitalia and other sexual and reproductive anatomy, chromosomes, hormones, and secondary physical features emerging from puberty”.

¹⁹ [A/HRC/35/36](#).

gender. The different and sometimes oppositional uses of the term have created a further layer of complexity, which the anti-gender opposition has taken advantage of in undermining the term. The Working Group hence finds it useful to explain how it uses the term in the context of its mandate of eliminating discrimination against all women and girls.

III. Gender in the mandate of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

14. The Working Group was created in 2010 with a mandate to promote the elimination of discrimination against women, including by helping to identify, in dialogue with States and other relevant actors, good practices related to the elimination of laws that discriminate against women or are discriminatory to women in terms of implementation or impact.²⁰ In 2019, the name was changed to explicitly include girls,²¹ although the Working Group has always understood its mandate to include women (including those who identify as women) and girls of all ages and of different identities and socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. It has taken a life-cycle approach to understanding discrimination against women, as gender inequality manifests itself at all stages of life.

15. The Working Group has in its work referred to the interpretation by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women of the definition of discrimination against women provided in article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.²² That interpretation, as explained above (see para. 9), operates with the term “gender”, in addition to the term “sex”. Moreover, like that Committee, the Working Group finds that discrimination against women is based on both biological and socially constructed differences and acknowledges that women’s experiences of discrimination are determined also by other social identities, such as race, ethnicity, disability, age and sexuality. It aims to specifically include the voices of women facing intersectional and multiple forms of discrimination in all tools at its disposal, such as thematic and country visit reports, communications and statements. In its 2018 thematic report, for example, the Working Group emphasized that “there are multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women around the world and within countries that reinforce and sustain each other” and that “all women, in their diversity and many different circumstances, are affected differently by discriminatory laws and practices”.²³

16. In line with this intersectional approach, and as a mechanism for all women, the Working Group has in its work aimed also to address the specific problems faced by women of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. While the Working Group understands “gender identity” in its accepted meaning as the deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, it emphasizes that it is not (per)formed independently of the gendered social structures and norms. Gender is neither a substitute for the term “women” nor it is a term that refers only to transgender persons; rather, it refers to social systems that operate at different levels to create vulnerabilities and privileges for all gendered people.²⁴ It is both a system of domination and an individual expression formed in the social context of gender inequality and other systems of inequality. While it is not located solely in the individual or in interpersonal relationships, it manifests itself in personal identities and in social interactions.

17. The Working Group understands gender as a system of hierarchy, which uses socialization to construct human beings according to what the culture prescribes for different sexes. This system disproportionately distributes power to males through the cultural

²⁰ Human Rights Council resolution 15/23.

²¹ Human Rights Council resolution 41/6.

²² The definition as set out in article 1 is as follows: “‘Discrimination against women’ shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”

²³ [A/HRC/38/46](#), para. 11.

²⁴ Interview by Mindy Jane Roseman with Gita Sen, as cited in Ali Miller, “Fighting over the figure of gender”, *Pace Law Review*, vol. 31, No. 3 (June 2011), pp. 837–872.

hegemony of overvalued masculinity. It establishes patterns of expectations of behaviour, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society such as the family, the economy, the legal and justice systems and the media, and is also an entity in and of itself. As a system of domination, it is maintained through: control of women's sexuality and reproductive capacity; the sexual division of labour; the establishment of the male sex and masculinity as the norm; the idea that there exists two distinct dichotomous sexes; and the idea that heterosexuality is the norm.

18. Gender systems link with, but are distinct from, the systems that organize sexuality and sexual orientation.²⁵ But sexism, normative heterosexuality and dichotomous understanding of gender are all interrelated, as expressions of the patriarchal structures. It is thus not surprising that both women's rights and LGBTIQ+ rights have been attacked by the anti-gender movements.

IV. Gender backlash and the anti-gender movements

19. Anti-gender campaigns started as soon as the term "gender" was introduced in the context of the United Nations in the 1990s, but were led at the international negotiations and theological levels.²⁶ In the 2010s, transnational movements organized around fighting "gender ideology".²⁷ Those movements, in which gender is seen as a tool of "an ideological colonization" aimed at destroying the traditional family and family values, mobilized first in Europe and then in Latin America. Women's rights and LGBTIQ+ rights have been under attack in other regions as well, including in the past decade. Moreover, some States have opportunistically used the COVID-19 pandemic to undermine women's rights – particularly reproductive rights – and LGBTIQ+ rights.²⁸

20. The anti-gender (or anti-gender ideology) movements include three specific groups of conservative actors – governmental actors, religious actors and civil society actors – who have formed various national and transnational alliances with shared strategies and objectives. These strategies include the propagation of anti-gender discourse and the use of direct citizen action, such as petitions, protests and prayers, and governmental mechanisms to influence or change educational systems, legislation and public opinion. Specific targets of the movements are LGBTIQ+ rights, reproductive rights, sexuality and gender-sensitive education in schools, and the very notion of gender. Women human rights defenders who work in these areas, in particular those defending sexual and reproductive rights, have also increasingly been subjected to hostilities by anti-gender movements.²⁹ Listed below are some examples of attacks on women's rights that have come to the attention of the Working Group.

A. Attacks on reproductive rights

21. In recent years, the Working Group has witnessed the emergence of campaigns and legislative proposals to restrict or ban abortion, which in some countries include proposals

²⁵ Ali Miller and others, "Why the UN needs a broad concept of gender" (2016). Available at <https://law.yale.edu/ghjp/projects/gender-sexuality-and-rights/why-un-needs-broader-concept-gender>.

²⁶ Sonia Corrêa, "Gender ideology: tracking its origins and meanings in current gender politics" (2017).

²⁷ References to gender as a feminist ideology had already begun, with the 1997 publication of *The Gender Agenda: Redefining Equality* by Dale O'Leary. In that text, the author argues that substituting the word "gender" for the word "sex" in spaces like the United Nations is part of an international feminist strategy to undermine the belief that women and men fill distinct, immutable, complementary roles that, once gone, will inevitably lead to the dissolution of the family and society.

²⁸ See, for example, the Working Group's statement entitled "Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic must not discount women and girls" (20 April 2020); the joint statement, issued by members of the Working Group and several other human rights experts, entitled "COVID-19: the suffering and resilience of LGBT persons must be visible and inform the actions of States" (14 May 2020); and the joint press releases, issued by the Working Group and other human rights experts, entitled "United States: authorities manipulating COVID-19 crisis to restrict access to abortion, say UN experts" (27 May 2020) and "UN rights experts fear Uganda is using COVID-19 emergency powers to target LGBT people" (27 April 2020).

²⁹ See A/HRC/38/46.

for a total ban, and the rising problem of the unavailability of abortion owing to the rise of “conscientious objection”³⁰ and other procedural hurdles. Simultaneously, initiatives to reform the restrictive legislation in Latin American countries have been under attack. Some States attempted to curtail access to termination to pregnancy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

22. The Working Group considers the defence of reproductive rights as one of its core tasks, particularly in the current context.³¹ In addition to addressing these issues in its thematic reports (in particular its 2016 report, which included a thematic analysis on eliminating discrimination against women in the area of health and safety,³² and its 2018 report, which included an analysis on reasserting equality and countering rollback) and all of its country visit reports, the Working Group has issued a position paper on reproductive rights.³³ Moreover, the Working Group has dealt with a number of communications regarding restrictive abortion laws or proposals of such laws, and the procedural impediments to access to abortion,³⁴ and has submitted several amicus curiae briefs on the topic.³⁵ It has also issued press releases concerning recent attacks on reproductive rights³⁶ and public statements.³⁷ It is committed to asserting these rights.

B. Attacks on gender equality and sexuality education

23. The Working Group has also observed attacks on sexuality education and gender-sensitive education in many countries in recent years. The attacks include opposition to the introduction of sexuality education or education for gender equality, the closure of gender studies programmes and the reduction of funds for gender studies and, most recently, the introduction or proposal of laws prohibiting education on sexuality and/or gender.

24. In its work, the Working Group places an emphasis on gender-equality education and sexuality education as a necessary step for eliminating discrimination against women. It has addressed these topics in its thematic reports (particularly its 2018 report,³⁸ in which it addressed attacks on sexuality education) and all of its country visit reports. It has also issued

³⁰ See [A/HRC/WG.11/41/1](#).

³¹ See [A/HRC/38/46](#).

³² [A/HRC/32/44](#).

³³ “Women’s autonomy, equality and reproductive health in international human rights: between recognition, backlash and regressive trends” (2017).

³⁴ See for example, communications USA 4/2015, ARG 3/2018, POL 1/2016, GTM 12/2018, ECU 3/2013 and DOM 3/2016, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/>.

³⁵ Amicus briefs submitted by the Working Group to the Supreme Court of Brazil on the denial of abortion services and the prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, to the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on termination of pregnancy in Northern Ireland, and to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Korea on the review of the constitutionality of the country’s criminal law on abortion. Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/AmicusCuriae.aspx>.

³⁶ See, for example, the press releases “United States: authorities manipulating COVID-19 crisis to restrict access to abortion, say UN experts” (27 May 2020), and “Poland urged not to criminalise sex education or tighten access to abortion” (16 April 2020).

³⁷ The Working Group regularly issues public statements on the occasion of International Safe Abortion Day (28 September). Working Group statements and press releases are available from the web page of the Working Group (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-women-and-girls>).

³⁸ [A/HRC/38/46](#).

several communications³⁹ and a press release⁴⁰ on the topic. It is committed to advocating for gender equality and sexuality education.

C. Attacks on instruments addressing gender-based violence

25. In addition, the Working Group has been witnessing attacks on the concept of gender in the instruments addressing gender-based violence, particularly in Central and Eastern European countries, where there has been significant opposition to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. In some countries the ratification process was delayed or stopped, and in others the Convention was proclaimed as not conforming with the respective Constitution.

26. In its country visits to members of the Council of Europe, the Working Group has consistently called on Governments to ratify the Istanbul Convention without reservations and ensure its effective implementation.⁴¹ The Working Group considers violence against women the most egregious form of discrimination against women and is committed to work for its eradication. The Working Group expressed its concern about the rise of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and the often inadequate responses of States.⁴²

D. Attacks on women human rights defenders

27. The Working Group has observed growing hostility towards women human rights defenders in recent years. As it noted in 2018, women human rights defenders have been facing serious challenges around the world, driven by deep-rooted discrimination against women and stereotypes about which roles are “appropriate” for women in society, intensified by rising fundamentalism, political populism, unchecked authoritarian rule and a disproportionate focus on corporate profit over human rights. Those working on the rights contested by fundamentalist groups, such as women’s sexual and reproductive rights and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, and those denouncing the actions of extractive industries and businesses, have faced a heightened risk of violence, including murder.⁴³

28. The Working Group has continuously aimed to give voice to women human rights defenders and increase the visibility of their struggles. Not only does the Working Group engage in conversations with women human rights defenders during its country visits, but in its convening capacity it brings them to United Nations spaces with the aim of amplifying their voices and addressing the human rights abuses they face.⁴⁴ Moreover, most of the recent communications of the Working Group deal with human rights abuses suffered by women human rights defenders.⁴⁵ The Working Group has also issued many public statements on the

³⁹ See, for example, communication PER 2/2018, concerning an upcoming decision of the Supreme Court of Peru that would eliminate the gender focus in the National Curriculum for Basic education, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24040>; and communication HUN 6/2018, concerning a directive decertifying and defunding the teaching of the subject of gender studies at institutions of higher education, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24042>.

⁴⁰ See, for example, “Poland urged not to criminalise sex education or tighten access to abortion” (16 April 2020).

⁴¹ See, for example, the reports of the Working Group on its country visits to Hungary in 2016 (A/HRC/35/29/Add.1) and to Poland in 2018 (A/HRC/41/33/Add.2).

⁴² See “Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic must not discount women and girls” (20 April 2020).

⁴³ A/HRC/38/46, para. 42.

⁴⁴ Panels include one, held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 26 July 2018, entitled “States’ responsibility towards the protection of women human rights defenders: 20 years after the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders”, and another, held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 13 March 2019, in the context of the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women, entitled “Current challenges and opportunities for women human rights defenders: how can the international community better support their work?”.

⁴⁵ See, for example, communications HND 4/2019, DZA 2/2020, EGY 14/2019, BGD 1/2019 and MYS 2/2019, available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.

topic, such as on the occasion of the International Day for Women's Human Rights Defenders,⁴⁶ has amplified the voices of those defenders in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis,⁴⁷ and is committed to working with women's human rights defenders.

V. Concluding remarks

29. In recent years the Working Group has observed serious backlash against women's rights and the very concept of gender and gender equality. Since 2010, transnational movements opposing "gender ideology" have formed, drawing conservative government, religious and civil society actors. Almost 30 years since gender was recognized in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as an important tool in combating discrimination against women, the term is now seriously contested, putting in jeopardy many of the hard-fought gains that women have achieved.

30. In the present guidance document, the Working Group reasserted the usefulness of the concept of gender for eliminating discrimination against women and clarified how it uses the term. Finally, in the document, the Working Group highlighted current challenges to women's rights, in particular the attacks by the anti-gender movements that are fighting "gender ideology". The Working Group will continue to address these challenges and work towards the elimination of all discrimination against women and girls.

⁴⁶ The Working Group has also issued statements and press releases concerning the situation in specific countries. See, for example, "Cameroon must protect human rights defenders – UN experts" (28 April 2020); "Thailand: judicial system abused by business to silence human rights defenders – UN experts" (12 March 2020); "Saudi Arabia: UN experts urge freedom for Loujain Al-Hathloul after 500 days in prison" (27 September 2019); and "Iran: release women jailed for protesting against compulsory wearing of veil" (16 August 2019).

⁴⁷ "Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic must not discount women and girls" (20 April 2020).