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Rising Extremism, Macroeconomic Policies, and the Relevance of Gendered Analysis

61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Side event organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN, and the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)

Concept Note

At this event, UNDP, the IPU, the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN, and ICAN will explore through a gendered lens the relationship between macroeconomic policies and rising extremism. Discussions will help to identify current threats, potential mitigation strategies and alternative macroeconomic approaches. Participants will also consider the positive potential for greater collaboration between parliamentarians and civil society, particularly women-led organizations. The event will examine how far this collaboration can prevent extremism through gender-responsive macroeconomic policies and through promoting peace, rights and pluralism.

BACKGROUND

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015. They signalled worldwide recognition that gender equality, good governance and peace and security are inextricably linked and that they are essential for responding to the most urgent challenges of our time. Sound economic policies are another critical factor for promoting sustainable development and peaceful, equitable societies.

In general, macroeconomic policies shape countries' approaches to resource distribution. They therefore have a significant impact on equality, rights, and power. Since 1980s, neoliberalism has been on the rise. To drive economic growth, neoliberalism relies on economic liberalization and deregulation, as well as on the privatization of essential government functions. At the same time, societies across the world have experienced significant increases in inequality, particularly gender inequality.¹ UN Women states: "Under neoliberalism, the market is understood as the main mechanism for growth, development and social equity. However, the idea that economic growth will necessarily lead to gender equality is problematic."² This case was first made in the 1990s when academics³ posited that neoliberal policies are biased and have harmful effects on women, including in terms of female unemployment, deterioration of working conditions, feminisation of poverty, and an increase in domestic violence.

The latest reports from Oxfam⁴ and the OECD also show that overall inequality is increasing worldwide, with fewer and fewer people owning as much as the poorest half of humanity. The links between the impact of economic policies and rising extremism is also becoming more evident. The UNDP report *Preventing violent extremism through promoting inclusive development, tolerance and respect for Diversity* identifies limited opportunities for upward mobility and inequality as two of the drivers that can lead to radical behaviour and result in violent extremist action. A forthcoming expert group discussion paper by ICAN also highlights the links between rising inequality, decreases in State social welfare, conditions that enable people to be recruited to armed groups and the radicalization of individuals and communities. Urbanization, migration and increasing social pluralism are growing across the world. At the

¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/csw59-egm-report-en.pdf>

² Ibid

³ Sparr, P. (Ed.). (1994). *Mortgaging women's lives: Feminist critiques of structural adjustment*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2017-01-16/just-8-men-own-same-wealth-half-world>

same time, identity-based movements that fracture social cohesion and foster bigotry are also on the risk. They will only foster greater fragility and further undermine economic development. Within the world's parliamentary community, there is a growing awareness that there is a limit to which growth can be used as the overarching objective of the economy and the main measurement of progress. As stated in IPU Quito Communiqué: "Decision-makers must work to reduce the vast inequalities of conditions and opportunities that exist today both within and between countries. Incentives and regulation must be put in place for market forces to work towards well-being. As a number of countries at various levels of development have shown, it is possible today for all governments to adopt indicators to help better target economic, social and environmental policies for human welfare. Measuring national well-being beyond mere GDP will be critical in redefining growth, not only in terms of material production and consumption, but also in terms of social and environmental progress.... A revised growth model will also need to rely more on distributive policies to spread wealth and opportunity more evenly in order to make economies more viable and strengthen well-being."⁵

A better understanding of the links between current economic models, inequality (including gendered dimensions as they affect men and women) and extremism is imperative to achieve SDG 16.

UN Security Council resolution 2242 and other policies have highlighted the gendered dimensions of violent extremism. But less attention has been paid to the role of macroeconomic policy in this process. This meeting will address, from a gender standpoint, the relationship between economic policies and rising extremism. It will identify practical solutions and reforms that could alleviate and mitigate current trends.

Economic policies are agreed upon in national parliaments. Parliaments are therefore uniquely positioned to promote peace, pluralism and gender equality in their roles of overseers, lawmakers, and representatives of the people. Strengthening parliamentary engagement in gender equality and promoting parity among men and women parliamentarians⁶ is essential. However, inadequate consideration has been given to sustaining peaceful societies and supporting the role of parliaments in formulating economic policies that link equality to peace and security. In particular, the positive potential of greater collaboration between parliamentarians and women-led civil society organizations needs to be further supported. The side event will provide an opportunity to address strategies for greater future interaction.

DATE, TIME AND VENUE

The side event will take place on 16 March 2017 from 9 to 10.45 a.m. at Uganda House, 336 East 45th Street, New York.

SPEAKERS

- Charles Chauvel, Team Leader, Inclusive Political Processes, UNDP
- IPU representative
- Danish mission representative
- Radhika Balakrishnan, faculty director, Center for Women's Global Leadership; professor of women's and gender studies, Rutgers University.
- Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini, co-founder and executive director, ICAN. She is spearheading the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL)

FOCUS

To enable economists, governmental actors, parliamentarians, civil society advocates and practitioners to discuss the links between macroeconomic policy, gender and rising extremism within relevant policy and practitioner communities.

⁵ The Quito Communiqué – from the general debate of the 128th IPU Assembly in Quito, Ecuador, March 2013: <http://www.ipu.org/conf-e/128/quito-comm.htm>

⁶ <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/why-women-inclusive-security-and-peaceful-societies/>

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The meeting will be the first step towards establishing the scope and direction of a proposed research project on alternative economic policies. These policies should ensure that the social and economic rights of every human being are realized, as enshrined in the UN Convention on Economic and Social Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Legislators also have a duty to help realize these rights in support of the *leaving no one behind* agenda.

ORGANISERS

UNDP. The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women are central to the mandate of UNDP and intrinsic to its development approach. This includes advocating for women's and girls' equal rights, combating discriminatory practices, and challenging the roles and stereotypes that affect inequalities and exclusion. UNDP is the largest global implementer of parliamentary, constitutional and electoral support programming. It is very active in advancing civic engagement and women's participation and decision-making in politics and peacebuilding. It has strong expertise in other areas of governance, such as peace and development, resilience-building, and the elimination of poverty and inequality. UNDP also enjoys strong relationships with other agencies in the UN system, partly through its network of country offices. It has a global implementation presence.

The IPU is the international organization of parliaments. It has 171 Member Parliaments. It seeks to protect and build global democracy through political dialogue and concrete action. It works closely with the United Nations and other partner organizations whose goals it shares. The IPU focuses on gender equality, economic prosperity for all, and peace and security. It particularly emphasises gender equality in decision-making processes and recognizes the link between democracy and the equal participation of men and women in parliament. UNDP works in countries emerging from conflict or in transition to democracy. It helps to develop parliaments as robust and democratic institutions that can work to heal national divisions, promote political dialogue and champion national reconciliation. As war often affects women and youth disproportionately, the IPU focuses on peace and security in relation to these groups, based on UN Security Council resolutions 1325, 2250 and other resolutions on women, peace and security. The IPU works for sustainable development and economic growth that are founded on an improved quality of life for all, respect for the environment's regenerative capacities and more inclusive decision-making processes to support human well-being.

ICAN. Since it began in 2006, ICAN has supported civil society in conflict-affected countries by publishing issue briefs and research, supporting women's peacebuilding networks and providing resources for women activists. In autumn 2015, ICAN formally spearheaded the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL). WASL brings together existing women's networks, practitioners, and organizations with long-standing experience in addressing extremism and promoting peace, rights and pluralism. The aim is to improve practices in communities affected by violence, and inform and offer pragmatic policy solutions for the international community. As coordinator of WASL, and in partnership with the Royal Norwegian Government, ICAN launched the Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) in the margins of the September 2016 UN General Assembly. The GSX is a durable mechanism for systematic and structured interactions between government and independent civil society organizations. These include members of WASL and others with a track record in programming, analysis and policy advocacy that addresses extremism and related militarism. GSX sustains a "communities-first," "whole of society" approach to PVE. The aim of Exchange is to enable the exchange of effective solutions and recommendations for critical policy and programming reform.