November 26, 2018

Joint Letter in support of the Report by OHCHR Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its causes and consequences

To: Member states of the United Nations General Assembly

Your Excellencies:

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, support the acknowledgement by the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly of the OHCHR Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women Report (A/73/301) on Violence Against Women in Politics. The report sends a vital message that violence against women in politics (VAWP) contributes to the underrepresentation and political disempowerment of women worldwide. We urge all member states to make concrete and accountable commitments to pursuing the recommendations of the report.

Women’s political participation has made global progress over the last 100 years. However, women remain underrepresented at all levels of political decision-making. An important form of gender-based violence (GBV), VAWP violates women’s human rights to live free from GBV, women’s civil rights to protection from discrimination based on gender, and women’s political rights to participate in credible elections. VAWP threatens gender equality and the building of robust and resilient democratic institutions, which is a key objective of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

VAWP is a universal problem that is not tied to any specific socioeconomic level or “degree” of democracy. It has unique manifestations in each context where it occurs. VAWP is not only a manifestation of inequality, but – significantly – a mechanism that formally institutionalizes women’s subordinate position in society by coercively excluding them from state governance. It affects women’s participation as voters, candidates, election officials, activists and political party leaders, and undermines genuine and inclusive democratic processes.

Different types of violence call for different types of responses. Based on the recommendations of the report, we call on Member states to emphasize research to establish baselines for VAWP and eradicate it where ever it occurs. Member states must work across state institutions and in partnership with civil society and other community stakeholders to address the root causes of VAWP, provide justice for its victims and end impunity.

VAWP often falls between the gaps in legal frameworks for either violence against women or political violence. Many countries lack clearly defined and sanctioned legal codes on VAWP, and where laws exist, enforcement often is weak and perpetrators act with impunity. Ending impunity for VAWP ensures that victims are protected and obtain an effective remedy, while at the time deterring future crimes, forcing government action and investigation, driving legal reform, and compelling action by business and political parties to end or prevent abuses.

We recognize that VAWP also often occurs in online spaces, such as social media, and adversely affects a range of civic and political actors, such as candidates, civic activists, journalists and public administrators. As the Special Rapporteur’s earlier report on online violence against women and girls (A/HRC/38/47) documents, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) facilitated violence against women, including online threats, harassment, and intimidation, are often used against women in politics, and requires specialized legislation and protections.

We call on all UN member states to support the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women on the issue of VAWP as presented in A/73/301. Recognizing the collective power of your voices, we ask...
for your support to convey that the international community is genuinely invested in gender equality, resilient democracy and human rights.

Sincerely,

The International Foundation of Electoral Systems, The Carter Center, and our distinguished partners:

- Advocacy for Women in Peace and Security in Africa
- Advocacy for Women With Disabilities Initiative
- Akhaya Women
- Allamin Foundation for Peace and Development
- Amara Cambodia Woman Network for Development
- Arr Man Women Development Organization
- Asisténsia Legál ba Feto no Labarik
- Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche sur le Développement
- Association Djazairouna des victimes du terrorisme
- Association of War Affected Women
- Association pour la Promotion du Droit à la Difference
- Atide
- Atta Al-Khair Foundation, Libya
- Bougainville Women’s Federation
- Coast Education Center
- Democracy Resource Center Nepal
- Eastern Highlands Family Voice
- EqualityNow
- Federation of Muslim Women in Nigeria
- Futures Without Violence
- Gender and Development for Cambodia
- Global Rights for Women
- Hornbill Organization
- International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law
- International Alliance of Catholic Social Justice Organizations
- International Civil Society Action Network
- International Women's Development Agency
- Iraqi Firdaws Society
- Justice, Human Rights and Gender Civil Association
- Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency
- Liberia Election Observation Network
- Libyan Women Forum
- Manara Foundation for Rights, Freedoms and Humanitarian Works from Libya
- Mothers’ Strength Women Development School
- Myanmar Capacity Development Institute
- Myanmar Independent Living Initiative
- Myanmar Network Organization for Free and Fair Elections
- National Association of Social Workers
- National Democratic Institute
- National Organization for Women Foundation
- National Union of Organizations of the Disabled
- New Myanmar Foundation
- Ofyia
- OPEN ASIA/Armanshahr Foundation
- Organization for People that Suffer from Paralytic Strokes
- PAIMAN Alumni Trust
- Peace Track Initiative
- Peace X Peace
- Reactor- Research in Action
- Rede Feto Timor Leste
- Regional Center for Mediation and Dialogue
- Shan Women’s Action Network
- Smash Strategies
- Social Actors' Group
- SoS Colombe RDC
- Ta’ang Women’s Organization
- Tounissyet
- Tunisian Association of Democratic Women
- Union de l'Action Féminine
- US National Committee for UN Women
- Wi'am: Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center
- Wide Bay Conservation Association
- Witness Somalia
- Women and Girls Advancement and Resources Center
- Women Enabled
- Women for Afghan Women
- Women Graduates-USA
- Women in International Security
- Women in International Security- Canada
- Women Watch Afrika, Inc.
- Women's Action for New Directions
- Women’s League of Burma
- Women’s Local Resource Center
- Women’s Refugee Commission
- Yang Chi Thit
- Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association
- Zonta International