The role of women’s rights organizations in the response to and recovery from COVID-19
A panel discussion, 23 March 2021, 10-11 a.m. (EST)

Introduction
The role that women’s rights organizations have played and continue to play in the response to and recovery from COVID-19 is of critical importance for the priority theme of the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65) “women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.” As noted by the United Nations Secretary General, women’s rights organizations have supported those most affected economically, ensuring that shelters remain open for domestic violence survivors and disseminating public health messages to communities. They have played a critical advocacy role calling for and proposing measures that pave the way to a more equal post-COVID world and holding decision-makers to account for concrete change. Yet, women’s rights organizations have faced compounded challenges given the surge in demand for support, mobility restrictions, diminishing funding and poor working conditions. These challenges must be addressed to ensure that the resilience of women’s rights organizations - and that of the population groups they serve and represent – do not continue to be threatened.

Objective
This session aims to share findings and exchange views on the role that women’s rights organizations play and how best they can be supported to ensure that their critical roles are strengthened.

The panel discussion will:

- Present and disseminate the findings of UN Women’s Policy Brief No. 20 on “COVID-19 and women’s rights organizations: bridging response gaps and demanding a more just future”
- Expand the conversation with examples, recommendations and reflections on measures that have worked and areas of improvement, from the grassroots to the macro transnational level.
- Highlight critical aspects relevant for the themes of CSW65 and Generation Equality Forum.

Background
In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. As part of its response, UN Women moved to work on a specific policy brief series on COVID-19, highlighting the policy responses needed to mitigate the immediate impact of the crisis on women and girls, and promote a gender-responsive recovery. The UN Women policy brief series synthesizes research findings, analysis, and policy recommendations on key policy areas around gender equality and women’s rights in an accessible format. These concise and relevant policy-oriented documents are useful resources for gender

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equality advocates, civil society, and other policy actors working to achieve gender equality and women’s rights.

Both as part of the individual briefs and a stand-alone brief, UN Women provided evidence of the support women’s rights organizations have provided as part of the pandemic responses and recommendations of how their critical role can be safeguarded. The Policy Brief that will be presented during the panel discussion highlights the predicament that many women’s rights organizations face of experiencing increased relevance and demand for their services, at the same time as civic closure, restrictive work conditions and diminishing funding. By showcasing the critical roles these organizations are playing in the context of the pandemic, as essential service providers, advocates and watchdogs, the brief also identifies a set of recommendations to strengthen them in the short and long term.

These research findings and recommendations are key for discussions around both the priority theme of **CSW65** “women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” and the review theme of “women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development”. They are also critical for the **Generation Equality Forum**, a civil society centred global gathering for gender equality convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and France. The Forum will launch a series of concrete, ambitious and transformative actions to achieve immediate and irreversible progress towards gender equality, with one of its multi-stakeholders **Action Coalitions** focusing on Feminist Leadership and Movement Building.

**Agenda**

Moderation by Lopa Banerjee, Director, Civil Society Division and Executive Coordinator of the Generation Equality Forum, UN Women - confirmed

- Opening remarks by Åsa Regnér, Assistant Secretary General and UN Women Deputy Executive Director - confirmed

- Presentation by
  - Constanza Tabbush, Research Specialist, UN Women - confirmed
  - Victoria Díaz García, Partnership & Advocacy Specialist, UN Women - confirmed

- Discussion by
  - Gladys Acosta, Chair of the CEDAW Committee - confirmed
  - Elisenda Balleste Buxo, Project Coordinator for the EU co-funded Global Monitor of COVID-19’s impact on Democracy and Human Rights project of the Democracy Assessment Unit-IDEA - confirmed
  - Felogene Anumo, co-leader of Building Feminist Economies Program at the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) - confirmed

- Q&A and closing remarks