

GENEVA (14 July 2020)- The COVID-19 pandemic has sparked a pandemic of gender-based violence and discrimination against women that requires urgent action, say UN and regional experts on violence against women and women's rights.

As countries imposed lockdowns to fight the health pandemic, the world saw "dramatic increases in cases of domestic violence, including violence by intimate partners, sexual violence and femicide," the seven experts* said today in a joint [statement](#). "Urgent steps must be taken to combat this pandemic within a pandemic.

"The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted existing gaps and deep-rooted gender-based discrimination," they said. "Fewer police interventions and the closure of courts, shelters and essential services for victims have emboldened perpetrators and aggravated risks faced by women and girls."

They also said restrictions on the provision of health and reproductive health services, increased domestic and unpaid care responsibilities, and the burden of providing for the basic needs of family life were taking an additional toll on both the physical and mental wellbeing of women everywhere.

"The closure of schools poses an additional problem, with millions of girls being kept at home, heightening the risk of sexual exploitation, early pregnancies, rape, early marriages, forced marriages and female genital mutilation," they said.

"As the world struggles to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, we call on all States to seize the opportunity to 'build back better' by reinforcing and expanding efforts they have already made to promote and protect the rights of women in all spheres of life," the experts said.

ENDS

* **Dubravka Šimonovic**, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; **Hilary Gbedemah** Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; **Elizabeth Broderick**, Chair of the UN Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice; **Marceline Naudi**, President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence of the Council of Europe (GREVIO); **Margarette May Macaulay**, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Rapporteur for Women's Rights; **Lucy Asuagbor**, Special Rapporteur on Rights of Women in Africa; and **Tatiana Rein Venegas**, President of the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention.

The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human

Urgent action needed to end pandemic of gender-based violence, say women's rights experts

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