

Violence Against Women in Peace Time: Impact of the COVID Pandemic

Date: 23rd November



[Click here](#) to watch the recording of the event

Christine Tremblay (the Chair of UN Studies) and UN Youth Impact organised a virtual webinar that focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on efforts to reach targets set out in SDG 5 - Gender Equality. The event reflected on the data presented in a recent UN report: [Will the Pandemic Derail Hard Won Progress on Gender Equality](#). The report was published by UN Women and shared 'best practices' from Global South states and the progress of their responses in preventing and responding to violence against women during the pandemic.

The event was opened by Ms. Tremblay who reminded the audience that the pandemic has affected women and girls disproportionately around the world. The Panelists, **Ms. Antra Bhatt, Professor Lina Maria Céspedes-Báez, and Ms. Tonni Brodber** highlighted how responses to COVID-19 must be formulated to ensure that GBV survivors have easy access to resources and technology that could support their recovery and transition. One idea everyone emphasised was the urgent need for governments to include and provide resources in their COVID lockdown and recovery plans for preventative and support measures for GBV survivors, so that we don't see a long term surge in violence against women and girls as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The reason for this urgency Antra Bhatt explained is because the pandemic and government responses have exposed and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities which disproportionately affect women and girls. The first speaker, Ms. Bhatt revealed that during the peak months of the first wave of the pandemic, when schools and childcare centers closed, 48.4 million women (compared to 30.0 million men) were absent from work. Beyond the immediate impacts of the pandemic, the diversion of funds to the pandemic's response restricts the funding and thereby the access to essential health services for women and girls. Moreover, the pandemic has intensified women's unpaid care and domestic work, with many contending with reduced income. Ms. Bhatt concluded by reminding the audience that the pandemic has led to a '[shadow pandemic](#)' and she believed Gender must be placed front and centre in the response to the ongoing pandemic. Ultimately, she said urgent action is needed to set us back on track to achieve the SDG's, especially SDG 5 on Gender Equality.

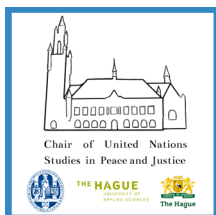
The second speaker, Professor Lina Maria Céspedes-Báez introduced a critical perspective on the strategies implemented in Colombia in response to COVID-19. As an example, Professor Céspedes-Báez explained that Columbia has digitized its court sessions to ensure that access to justice would not be affected by its lockdown. However, this measure is not without fault and Professor Céspedes-Báez emphasised that lack of access to technology in many areas and the lack of digitized court documents has been problematic and is negatively impacting the citizens right to justice. With decree 460, she explained that the Columbian government secured access to the 'Family Commissioners' which is a service to protect evidence, relocate victims of domestic violence, offer telephonic legal advice or psychosocial orientation, and more. However, Professor Céspedes-Báez pointed out that the 'Family Commissioners' were not very effective before the pandemic because they lacked appropriate budget, infrastructure and human resources. Luckily, the reach of the telephonic legal advice and psychosocial support seemed to be more positive. According to the Bogotá Secretary of Women, by May, the number of calls on national and regional governmental lines had augmented by 230%. Alliances with supermarkets and drugstores were made to provide safe spaces for women to make these calls.

Prof. Céspedes-Báez's conclusion was factual and comprehensive. She found that the pandemic has sped up the digitalization of every of our daily lives which is a welcome phenomenon in regards to access to justice. Prof. Céspedes-Báez made an effort to end the presentation on a positive note stating that:

"It is important to say that the pandemic has made visible GBV and other gender-related dimensions of life that were not front and center in the country. Our challenge is to maintain this momentum and keep on designing and implementing appropriate measures to effectively eradicate discrimination and violence against women."



From top left to bottom right: Ms. Tremblay, Ms. Antra Bhatt, Prof. Lina Maria Céspedes-Báez, and Ms. Tonni Brodber.



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The third panelist, Ms. Tonni Ann Brodber highlighted how Caribbean women are more likely to contract COVID-19 because many of them are working in heavily impacted and low-paid sectors and presented the Caribbean's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Brodber set out how the Caribbean has seen an increase in applications for social protection during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to UN Women, income support may be insufficient to address systemic poverty and help women escape violent homes and/or relationships. The pilot programme by UN Women therefore sought to enhance the overall economic security in the household, by linking cash transfer programmes with conflict resolution programmes of the government. Ms. Tonni Ann Brodber set out that we must encourage the Caribbean, and other governments, to work on introducing funding in order to respond effectively to violence against women and GBV during COVID-19. She pointed out that we must centre gender equality in all our measures.

Ms. Brodber concluded by sharing with the audience the the importance of the idea behind the #orangetheworld movement. She encouraged wearing orange on the 25th of November to remind victims of GBV that they are not alone and join the action coalition by the UN Women Generation Equality campaign.



The UN Youth Impact team is proud to stand with the victims of GBV and the #orangetheworld movement!

UN Youth Impact would like to thank Ms. Tremblay, Ms. Bhatt, Professor Céspedes-Báez, and Ms. Brodber, for their time and expertise.