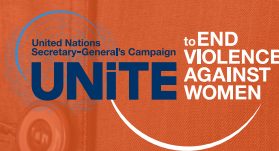


Photo: UN Women/Christopher Herwig

UN INTER-AGENCY STATEMENT- CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS' ROLE IN ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE ARAB STATES



UNITED NATIONS

In support of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence against Women campaign (UNiTE) is a multi-year effort aimed at preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls around the world. The UNiTE global theme for 2022 is:

“Activism to end violence against women”.

Within the Arab States region, unprecedented awareness and momentum have been generated around gender-based violence against women and girls (VAWG) thanks to the relentless work of women's human rights defenders, grassroots activists, and survivor advocates in the region and worldwide. The release of the most recent violence against women estimates in March 2021 confirmed

what we already know: Gender-based violence against women and girls globally, including in the Arab States region, continues unabated. As such, 1 in 3 women, around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner - a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade. Alarming, the Eastern Mediterranean Region, which includes several Arab States, has one of the highest prevalence rates worldwide at 31 per cent. Young women are not immune, by the time they reach their mid-twenties, 1 in 4 young women (aged 15-24 years) who have been in a relationship will have already experienced violence by an intimate partner. Other forms of violence prevail in the region, including sexual harassment, child marriage and female genital mutilation.

The critical role of civil society organisations is clearly outlined in various UN framework, mandates and recommendation: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), (article 3), the Beijing Declaration (1995), the Women, Peace and Security agenda, UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 2122, 2422, 2467 and 2493. In 2013, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on women human rights defenders, which discussed concerns for their safety, but also stressed the value of their activism and their work on ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment. Finally, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has issued several Agreed Conclusions over the years that acknowledge the valuable contribution of civil society to the elimination of violence against women and girls.

Therefore, the role of civil society organisations, particularly women's civil society organisations, in working to end gender-based violence against women and girls should not be understated, underestimated or undervalued. In the Arab States region, women's civil society organisations and women human right defenders advocate for laws and policies to meet international human rights standards, and they collect data to enhance the effectiveness of violence against women and girls' prevention and responses.

Furthermore, they have a critical role in capacity building and filling gaps in service provision for survivors of violence including the establishment of shelters and providing comprehensive and holistic essential and life-saving services such as counselling, legal aid, health, including sexual and reproductive health, and economic empowerment services to women and girls. Civil society organisations can also improve the connection between the community and governmental service providers, including criminal justice actors and are crucial in reaching women and girls who may be marginalized or experience multiple

and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as migrant women and girls, those living with disabilities or adolescent girls. Finally, in humanitarian contexts, women civil society organisations are often the first and only responders for survivors of violence, particularly in hard-to-reach areas.

UN Women along with sister agencies of the IBC Gender Justice and Equality sub-group ERAW/GBV are calling upon governments, and partners to act now to end, and show their solidarity to women's rights movements and activists through:

- Ensuring the promotion and protection of the civic space for women's civil society organisations and women human rights defenders.
- Increasing long-term funding and support to women's rights organisations working on effective solutions to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls.
- Promoting the leadership and participation of women and girls in political, policy making and decision-making spaces from global to local levels including in development, humanitarian and peace processes.

Recognizing this critical role of civil society to address gender-based violence against women and girls, the regional interagency working group on ending violence against women is launching a survey for civil society organisations, with a focus on women-led and women's rights organisations, as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence 2022. The questionnaire will provide information on the current situation regarding civil society organisations' priorities, good practices and challenges in Arab States towards the elimination of VAWG. The results from the questionnaire will serve as guidance to advocate for improved collaboration between the UN systems and civil society organisations.