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Statement submitted by Liberal International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Liberal International welcomes the past work of the United Nations and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women to end violence against women around the world. Liberal International also welcomes the work of the United Nations Special Rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls, and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, in bringing information about this violence to light.

In particular, Liberal International welcomes the joint appeal, issued in April 2016, by seven of the Special Rapporteurs together with the Chairperson of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, that called on the Government of Honduras to provide justice following the assassination of Berta Cáceres, an environmental activist who was killed because of her political conviction and her gender. Her murder was condemned internationally, including by UN Women, as a serious crime under national and international norms, including under the provisions of United Nations General Assembly resolution [68/181](#) of 2013, which applies to the protection and rights of women human rights defenders.

Liberal International fully aligns with this work, as exemplified by its campaign to bring global awareness to the Istanbul Convention, also known as the “Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence”, created by the Council of Europe and adopted in 2011. This campaign aims to globalize the Istanbul Convention as a best practice around the world, to finally put an end to violence against women and domestic violence. Liberal International would also like to recognize other organizations around the world which are equally committed to ending violence against women.

In particular, Liberal International recognizes those working to stop violence against women in politics, which is why it officially joined the Call to Action to Stop Violence against Women in Politics in March 2016, as launched by the National Democratic Institute (cooperating organisation of Liberal International) alongside the 60th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

This statement pays specific attention to this issue as raised by the National Democratic Institute and others, especially in light of the existing gaps within the current international normative framework in respect to identifying, preventing and eliminating violence targeting politically active women.

Recognizing that:

- Over the last few decades, women around the world have made historic gains in politics and political life, as activists, civic leaders, voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives and appointed officials
- These gains have brought with them a host of positive effects for women, democracy and society
- As women have stepped forward in these ways, they are too often met by discrimination, harassment, psychological abuse — increasingly projected online — and physical or sexual assault

- This backlash is occurring for a number of reasons — maybe indeed because women have stepped forward — and it describes the phenomenon of violence against women in politics
- These acts — whether directed at women as civic leaders, voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives or appointed officials — are designed to restrict the political participation of women as a group
- This violence reinforces traditional stereotypes and roles given to women, using domination and control to exclude women from politics

Stressing that all violence against women is unacceptable:

- Violence against women in politics is a specific form of this violence
- It is a human rights issue because it denies women their full and equal civil and political rights, making it an issue that must be addressed if gender equality is to be achieved

Acknowledging that violence against women in politics is an issue for everyone dedicated to promoting strong, inclusive and democratic societies:

- Political violence can be experienced by both men and women, yet the specific issue of violence against women in politics has distinct characteristics
- Violence against politically active women:
 - targets women because of their gender
 - can be gendered in its very form, as exemplified by sexist threats and sexual violence
 - discourages women in particular from being or becoming politically active, and therefore undermines the integrity of democratic processes
- Violence against women in politics can be perpetrated by men or women; unlike other forms of electoral or political violence usually carried out by political opponents, in these cases perpetrators may include a woman's family and friends or members of her political party, in addition to community and religious leaders, criminal gangs, non-state armed groups, state security forces and the police, among others
- Violence against women in politics poses a direct threat to women's ability to participate in political life, and is therefore a critical barrier to building sustainable democracies

Affirming that:

- Women's individual rights are protected under the framework of international norms and standards, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which defines "human rights" in terms of the "dignity and worth of the human person", including the "equal rights of men and women"
- This framework includes the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which has been signed by 189 states, and which states that women should have equal rights with men to participate in all levels of government and the public and political life of a country

- The International Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women explicitly defines violence against women as a form of sex-based discrimination, as a “manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women”, leading to “domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women”
- Violence against women in politics is consistent with the internationally accepted definition of violence against women, encompassing discrimination, harassment, psychological abuse, including online threats and harassment, and physical and sexual assault; it must therefore be recognized as a fundamental violation of human dignity
- As a violation of international norms, violence against women in politics is not the “cost of doing politics” — instead, it costs politics the benefits of the sustainable and responsive democratic governance that an inclusive political space can create
- This violence is a major barrier to women’s political participation, and threatens to undo many of the gains that have been made toward political and gender equality

Commending:

- The efforts of grassroots activists, party workers, legislators and media-watchers round the world that have begun to develop strategies to address and prevent violence against women in politics
- The emerging initiatives from a growing number of international organizations, including the National Democratic Institute working with partners such as Liberal International, the International Network of Liberal Women, UN Women, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Organization of American States, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems

Recalling:

- Liberal International’s Resolution to the 59th Congress in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2014) on preventing and combating violence against women through the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe which called on all liberal leaders and parliamentarians to work towards a worldwide Convention as an integral and effective instrument to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women
- Liberal International’s Written Statement on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls as submitted to the 23rd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council which called on the international community to take responsibility for ensuring that women’s rights are enshrined in every United Nations Member State’s national legislation and all forms of violence against women and girls are criminalized
- Liberal International’s Written Statement on the need to globalize the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence as submitted to the 27th Session of the United

Nations Human Rights Council and the 59th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

Calls:

- For the problem of violence against women in politics to be exposed in all its forms and acknowledged as a phenomenon not restricted to one area of the world
- On UN Women to raise awareness of the global impact of violence against women in politics as a serious violation of international norms and national laws regarding democracy, human rights and gender equality
- On the United Nations to develop indicators and collect systematic data on the prevalence, forms and impact of violence against women in politics
- On the United Nations and UN Women to support the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women in Girls in collecting data on violence against women in politics, recognizing this violence as a key policy issue
- For violence against women in politics to be integrated into all international instruments on violence against women, human rights, peace and conflict, and women's rights
- On the international community, across many different sectors — from governments, international and regional organizations, grassroots activists, political parties, representatives from the women's rights, security, justice and technology sectors, and others — to collaborate to exchange data, experiences and challenges related to their work to stop violence against women in politics, with the goal of building on and learning from the work of others

Commits:

- For liberal parliamentarians in government and opposition to take a stand in their parliaments and urge their governments to speak up and assert that violence is not the cost for women's political engagement
- To continue to work with the National Democratic Institute to spread awareness about the need to stop violence against women in politics by launching the Institute's Call for Action before the entire Liberal International membership at Liberal International's Executive Committee meeting in Tbilisi, Georgia
- To raise the National Democratic Institute's Call for Action before the 61st Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women by organising a side-event for civil society actors and relevant stakeholders
- To support those who work to bring male leaders together to contribute to this endeavour for women's rights
- To incorporate the fight against violence against women in politics in Liberal International Human Rights Committee's work and Liberal International's internal reflection on the challenges to liberalism in the twenty-first century