



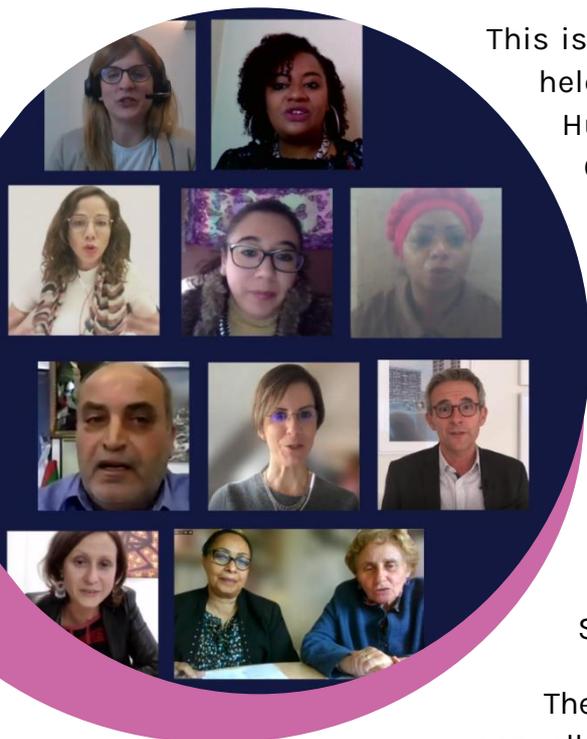
OIVF
OBSERVATOIRE
INTERNATIONAL
DES VIOLENCES
ENVERS LES FEMMES



UCLG
Committee

Social Inclusion
Participatory Democracy
and Human Rights

Guaranteeing the Right to the City for All Local governments commit to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG)



This is a report and summary of discussions of the session held on 7 October 2021 within the framework of the World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF) by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights (UCLG-CSIPDHR) and the Departmental Council of Seine Saint Denis with the support of the French Development Agency (AFD).

The event gathered a meaningful delegation of local government representatives and international partners to exchange on policy perspectives and experiences in addressing VAWG. This was the first public event in the international agenda of the « **International Observatory of Violence against Women** » project led by the Seine Saint Denis and UCLG with the support of the AFD.

The **World Human Rights Cities Forum** (WHRCF) is held annually in the South Korean city of Gwangju. After successfully holding 10 consecutive editions, the Forum has consolidated as a key meeting point for the human rights cities' movement. It is organized by the Gwangju International Centre, the UCLG-CSIPDHR and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute with the support of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNESCO.

With the support of:



Opening statements

Sharing local experiences and fostering multi-stakeholder cooperation



Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the main challenges to human rights guarantee at the local level, and local authorities are increasingly adopting more proactive measures to face this widespread threat across the world. According to UCLG-CSIPDHR coordinator **Amanda Fléty**, it is still necessary to better understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic over this structural phenomenon, and to highlight all the innovations put in place by local governments to protect women in this context. International exchange and decentralized cooperation between local authorities can help disseminate these promising initiatives - both the ones which were already consolidated, as well as new policies put in place in the context of the crisis - in connection to other city networking initiatives in the field of women rights and the right to the city.



The international cooperation project gathering local governments' to tackle VAWG led by the CD93 and supported by the French Development Agency (AFD) is a meaningful proposal in this regard. The president of Seine Saint Denis and co-president of the UCLG-CSIPDHR, **Stéphane Troussel**, highlighted how this is the result of long term policy-making efforts by this French territory, aimed at preventing and addressing VAWG through stakeholder cooperation, awareness raising efforts and unconditional protection mechanisms. The Seine Saint Denis Observatory on VAWG is one of the most consolidated in France, and has been employed as an example for other cities and urban territories. With the support of UCLG and the AFD, this project aims at bringing together worldwide cities, including the cooperation partners of CD93, to address VAWG through decentralized cooperation, practice exchange and joint advocacy.



The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, **Reem al Saleem**, recognized the role of municipal cooperation in addressing gender-based violence, particularly through the UCLG network. She highlighted the key role of local government policies in effectively addressing VAWG, quoting examples such as offering services for victims, creating guidelines for law enforcement or launching campaigns and other awareness raising initiatives. She also noted how local governments' role was even more crucial facing the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed

more women to violence by their partners. She also shared how the mandate of UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women benefited a lot from information shared by local authorities, and was now looking forward to continue this collaboration in coming years towards a shared goal: cities free from VAWG.



First round table

Exploring local perspectives and promising practices

The event's first roundtable was moderated by **Federico Poitier**, policy officer at the UCLG World Secretariat. He invited speakers to reflect on her own perspectives and policy experience on this issue, recalling how all women are different and how this panel would help recognize different needs in public spaces.

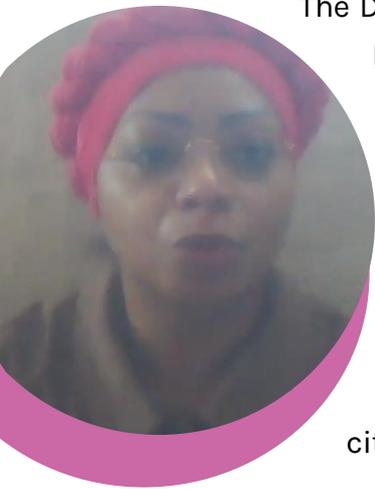
There's enough evidence and data to affirm that the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated VAWG. According to the Vice-Mayor of Quito, **Gissela Chalá**, this public health emergency has become self-evident with enough cruelty and dehumanization. However, violence in the public realm of the city went unnoticed for too long. Any policy seeking to guarantee the right to the city and achieving cities free from violence, should first address the social and economic impacts of urbanization. It is not only a matter of addressing material inequalities or forms of segregation, but changing social and symbolic production patterns of the city as well. We must first recognize how cities are not neutral in their design; they tend to segregate and exclude activities and people's not falling in its own vision of what's mainstream.



Bottom-up collective action and awareness raising play a key role in tackling VAWG. Ms. Chalá affirmed how she was the first Afro-Ecuadorian woman to become Councilor of her city; a symbolic victory which recalls how important it is for her to be there to represent those that always lived in exclusion. Quito counts with a sound human rights policy and has recently adopted the agreement "Quito without gender violence", focused on issues such as protection of girls from child labor or offering shelter to women and girls in great risk. In order to prevent femicides, Quito implemented an integral protection system working together with local courts and the judicial system. Finally, Quito is also putting in place measures to prevent VAWG in public spaces with a socio-spatial look. These efforts have been adapted to address new challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Chalá concluded by sharing her vision on "caring cities and human rights cities, based on the good living (buen vivir)", that focus not only on guaranteeing the right

to the city but also re-examining the new normal, which might mean after all going back to racist and patriarchal cities that mainstream violence in their daily life. Ms. Chalá called for local government collective action based on political and militant sorority, focused on placing caring at the center and producing new political values. It should tackle the feminization of poverty by strengthening the caring economy. It should provide reparations and address structural inequalities. In order to change the city, we must first change ourselves: Women will trigger this change.



The Deputy Mayor of Libreville and member of the African Network of Locally Elected Women (REFELA), **Annie Chrystel Limbourg**, shared how her administration pursued many efforts to address VAWG at a territorial level, even though Libreville lacks concrete tools to achieve a greater impact. Ms. Limbourg celebrated the policy innovation drive of the CD93 project, which can have a very positive impact for territories and cities like Libreville. The project focus on political advocacy is also relevant for Libreville; a city which promoted legislative changes at a national level to better protect women from sexual harassment and violence or children living alone in the streets without access to citizenship and protection.

Libreville's policy on VAWG strongly relies on continuous cooperation with social stakeholders and local civil society, which helps to provide social and health care to unaccompanied children or women in urgent need of protection. Cooperation with local actors can also help gain women's trust, which are still reluctant to speak out about their situation or to address local authorities in seek of protection. Awareness raising should foster women to denounce ill situations they might live in. Ms. Limbourg stressed the importance of promoting a shift of narrative from victim to fighter. She also referred to violence against women with regards to political participation. She highlighted how political advocacy should not only foster a larger participation of women in electoral lists, but greater protection and support for them to organize and be better able to represent the voice of people that got them elected. This is one of the main goals of the REFELA network, along with building capacities and raising awareness among local elected officials across the African continent.

Local authorities count with sound experiences in protecting women from violence, as recalled by Iztapalapa's Deputy Directress of Inclusion and Welfare **Angelica Olivares**. Iztapalapa's policy takes place in the context of a peripheral metropolitan territory where VAWG are especially prevalent. A mapping exercise developed by the same municipality helped to identify hotspots for VAWG in public space. Accordingly, its government recognized VAWG as a public health issue that puts women in a disadvantageous situation in all contexts (not only public spaces or social interactions, but also at a domestic level, as most rapes take place in the family

context). Embracing existing international law, Iztapalapa's narrative is based on addressing VAWG as a matter of guaranteeing human rights through a structural policy of the same municipality (therefore, not a matter of political will only).



Iztapalapa put in place several initiatives to protect women in public spaces, as the “Camino Mujeres Libres y Seguras” (Road of Free and Safe Women) initiative, which enhanced accessibility, mobility and lighting of public spaces while portraying pieces of street art and fostering a feeling of safety. The “Siempre Vivas” (Always Alive) initiative trained hundreds of professionals to raise awareness in the family context. This network of professionals is based on visiting private houses and identifying risks situations. This initiative counts with dedicated emergency shelters offering integral care. The municipality also focused on training police officers to better identify and address situations of risk. Finally, Ms. Olivares mentioned the program “Mujeres estudiando” (women studying) and the public care program as two relevant policies to support women work and highlight its economic and social role.

The vision of caring cities is more important than ever, as recalled by Montevideo's International Relations Directress **Fabiana Goyeneche**. She recalled how VAWG is another pandemic which has gone unaddressed for too long. Montevideo was a pioneer city in tackling this phenomenon 30 years ago. These policies actually inspired the implementation of related initiatives at a national level. Montevideo is now implementing its third equality plan to mainstream gender in government. The city now counts with a dedicated institution attached to the Mayor's office to better mainstream this approach across government: from budget to implementation.



Ms. Goyeneche noted how the current health and economic crisis is having a more profound impact over women. The pandemic is threatening positive results achieved in this sense over the last decades. Montevideo has implemented a recovery plan called “Plan ABC” to address the COVID-19 crisis through specific interventions on areas such as access to food, employment, housing and, of course, violence against women. This plan is based on mainstreaming intersectionality and the gender approach. Montevideo considers these emergency innovations will become structural. Indeed, over the last period, the city focused on strengthening the capacities of its own municipal staff and related initiatives.

Second round table

Moving forward towards strengthened decentralized cooperation among local authorities



The Directress of the Seine Saint Denis International Service, **Magali Fricaudet**, welcomed the call for political and militant sorority by all these local leaders. They will be an inspiration for the Seine Saint Denis project on local governments role in addressing VAWG, which aims at promoting decentralized cooperation among local authorities to exchange knowledge, foster policy implementation and jointly advocate at a UN and international level.

In order to provide a better context of what a local observatory on VAWG could look

like, the Directress of the CD93 Observatory on VAWG **Ernestine Ronai**



took the floor to reflect on her own territory's background. The work of CD93 on VAWG started two decades ago around the implementation of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. This work helped to establish a successful model based on three elements: First, to bring together all actors working on VAWG at a territorial level; Second, to develop a shared diagnosis and enhance monitoring tools and data gathering; Third, to develop effective policies at a territorial level.

Ms. Ronai highlighted how the Seine Saint Denis experience has always learnt from innovative solutions implemented in other territories such as Spain or Venezuela. Ms. Ronai recalled how collective work on VAWG among local authorities can help protect women through both mutual learning and advocacy. The Seine Saint Denis project will bring together local authorities to establish shared diagnosis, foster knowledge sharing, offer training programs and create tools to raise citizens' awareness.

Mayor **Al Sadi Fayes** from Jenin (Palestine) took the floor afterwards as a



historical partner city of Seine Saint Denis who is now eager to take part in this project. Building on the previous cooperation work with Seine Saint Denis, Jenin will do everything at its hands to protect women rights. It is not only a matter of protecting them from violence - in the case of Jenin, this is a double violence due to Occupation - but also supporting their role in public administration and local democracy. Jenin will surely benefit from exchanging points of view and practical experience with other local governments and territories worldwide that help reinforce its capacities.



The Governor of Ngazidja (Comores) **Sitti Farouata Mhoudine** took the floor to reaffirm her territory's willingness to join the project. As public figure, Ms. Farouata has been vocal in defending women rights. It hasn't been easy to tackle VAWG through policies in her country, especially due to prevalent traditionalist values at a social level. However, women engagement and overall reform (Comores adopted a new constitution recently which provides better guarantees in the fight against VAWG) provided critical support. Ms. Farouata believes that implementing a local observatory would help eradicate this problem, benefiting from recent changes in the legal structure of the State. For Ngazidja, awareness raising is essential; especially for women to better understand their rights and the law. This observatory could help articulate existing health, legal and psychological support to victims of rape.

By the closing of the event, some participants in the session shared their reflections to speakers. A speaker highlighted how, in the context of Korean society, this issue is oftentimes overlooked, provided only there's no large body injuries. There's a lack of legal protection and political awareness. Other Korean participants shared their interest by practices presented during the session.

Panelists highlighted how they all shared the same goal, as women suffering violence were the same everywhere (Libreville). It is a matter of protecting women rights as human rights (Montevideo), but also inviting more people to join this call, not only women but also men (Iztapalapa). Advancing a common roadmap and stressing women's central role in society (Quito) would help achieve meaningful results in this long-term fight (Comores) through decentralized cooperation, mutual learning and joint advocacy (Seine Saint Denis). If they fight together, cities will become stronger so women can play a greater role in the future (Jenin).

Finally, the Seine-Saint-Denis and the UCLG-CSIPDHR invited interested local authorities to reach our Secretariat (cisd1@uclg.org) to know more about this project and how to take part in it through the Observatory initiative.