Forum: **Commission on the Status of Women**
Question of: **Addressing the shrinking tolerance for women's rights**
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I. Description of the Issue

Despite significant international progress towards gender equality, recent years have witnessed growing resistance towards women's rights in many parts of the world. Legal protections and opportunities for women have expanded through decades of political polarization, misinformation, anti-rights movements and changing social norms have contributed to an increasing backlash against gender equality. This backlash is not only reflected in restrictive legislation but also in the growing hostility towards feminist movements, women human rights defenders and women's participation in politics and public life.

Addressing the shrinking tolerance for women's rights requires therefore more than protecting existing legal frameworks, it also demands a better understanding of social, political and economic factors. These contribute to resistance against gender equality. Delegates are encouraged to examine how changing gender roles, online radicalization, media narratives and public perception influences attitudes towards women's rights. Particular attention should be given to the role of men and boys as contributors to this resistance but also as partners in achieving gender equality, as well as to strategies that encourage cooperation rather than division

II. Definition of Key Terms

Backlash against women's rights: A backlash against women's rights refers to the growing resistance towards gender equality, often expressed through political, legal, social or cultural opportunities to women's rights initiatives. It may include restrictive legislation, anti-feminist rhetoric, online harassment, misinformation or the reduction of support for gender equality policies.

Gender Norms: Gender norms are socially constructed expectations about the roles, behaviours and responsibilities of women and men. While these norms differ across societies, rigid gender norms can reinforce discrimination and limit equal opportunities.

Patriarchy: Patriarchy refers to a social system in which men traditionally hold greater power and authority in political, economic and social institutions. Within discussions on gender equality, patriarchal structures are often examined as underlying causes of unequal opportunities and discrimination against women.

Misogyny: Misogyny describes prejudice, hatred or discrimination directed towards women, girls and their femininity. It can appear in various forms, including violence, harassment, stereotypes, hate speech and unequal treatment both offline and online.

Gender-based disinformation: Gender-based disinformation refers to false or misleading information specifically designed to discredit, intimidate or silence women, particularly women leaders, politicians, journalists and human rights defenders.

Political Polarization: Political polarization describes the increasing division of societies into opposing ideological groups, often reducing opportunities for constructive dialogue. Polarization can contribute to greater resistance towards gender equality initiatives and increase hostility towards women's rights advocates.

Shrinking Civic Space: Shrinking civic space refers to increasing restrictions on the ability of civil society organizations, journalists, activists and citizens to freely participate in public life. Women's rights organizations are often among those affected by these restrictions.

Harmful Masculinity: Harmful masculinity refers to social norms and expectations that encourage dominance, aggression, emotional suppression and unequal power relations based on gender. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women, these norms can contribute to discrimination, gender-based violence, resistance towards gender equality.

HeForShe Campaign 2014: HeForShe is a global solidarity movement launched by UN Women that encourages men and boys to actively support gender equality. The campaign promotes shared responsibility and highlights the positive role men can play in challenging harmful stereotypes and avenging women's rights.

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1993: This declaration was the first UN instrument to comprehensively define violence against women as a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

III. Background Information

The growing resistance towards women's rights cannot be explained by one single factor but rather several that have changed traditional gender roles. While increasing developments in women's participation in education, politics and the labour market have created greater opportunities, they have also led to resistance in some communities that view the changing of social structures as threatening and dangerous. Especially established identities or power structures feel particularly targeted. In some societies, the advancement of women's rights has been met with resistance from individuals and groups who perceive changing gender roles as a threat to established power structures and traditional expectations. Economic uncertainty, unemployment, misinformation and political polarization can amplify these perceptions, making gender equality an increasingly contested issue. Attention should be given to understanding the role of men and boys in supporting gender equality. While most men do not oppose women's rights, some online communities have promoted narratives portraying gender equality as a threat to men's social, economic or cultural status. These dynamics can contribute to increasing polarization, misogyny and hostility towards feminist movements. Society has been shaped by patriarchal structures, in which power has been disproportionately distributed to men and women. These systems have often provided men, as a social group, with greater access to education, property ownership, political representation and economic resources, while limiting women's opportunity, participation and autonomy.

Historical Background

For centuries, women were excluded from many areas of political, economic and public life through laws, customs and social norms that positioned men as primary decision-makers and authority figures. These historical power imbalances established unequal opportunities that have continued to shape institutions, public attitudes and gender relations long after many discriminatory laws were abolished. Although the United Nations has played a central role in advancing women's rights since its founding in 1945 through initiatives such as the Commission on the Status of Women, CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the legacy of these historical inequalities continues to influence contemporary societies. Today, resistance towards changing gender roles, combined with persistent stereotypes and unequal power structures, remains a significant obstacle in achieving gender equality, making it essential to address not only legal discrimination but also the social attitudes and institutional norms that continue to perpetuate inequality.

IV. Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Afghanistan: Afghanistan represents one of the most significant examples of the regression of women's rights. Since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, women's and girls have faced severe restrictions on education, employment, political participation and freedom of speech and movement. These restrictions have reinforced rigid patriarchal structures and become a central concern for the United Nations regarding the shrinking tolerance for women's rights.

Canada: Canada actively promotes gender equality both domestically and internationally through education, public awareness campaigns and support for civil society organizations. The country also supports initiatives, including UN Women's HeForShe campaign, that encourage men and boys to become active partners in advancing gender equality.

Sweden: Sweden remains one of the strongest advocates for gender equality and has implemented policies encouraging shared parental responsibility, women's political participation and equal representation.

South Korea: Although South Korea ranks among the worlds most developed economies, it has experienced increasing gender polarization in recent years. Public debate surrounding

feminism, mandatory military service, employment and changing gender roles has contributed to tensions between young men and women. These gender polarizing groups can be distinguished particularly between young anti-feminist men, often referred to as "idaenam," and young feminist women, sometimes described as "idaenyeo."

Iran: Iran remains a key country in discussion on women's rights because of restrictions on dress codes, freedom of expression and civil society, which illustrates how opposition to women's rights can become closely linked with political authority and social control. Following the "Women, Life, Freedom" protests beginning in 2022, many women activist and journalist experience arrests and legal consequences.

Namibia: Namibia can be used as a positive example of increasing female political leadership. In 2025, Namibia's first female president was elected, which shows how women's leadership can challenge patriarchal assumptions and demonstrates that women in politics strengthens, rather than threatens democratic governance.

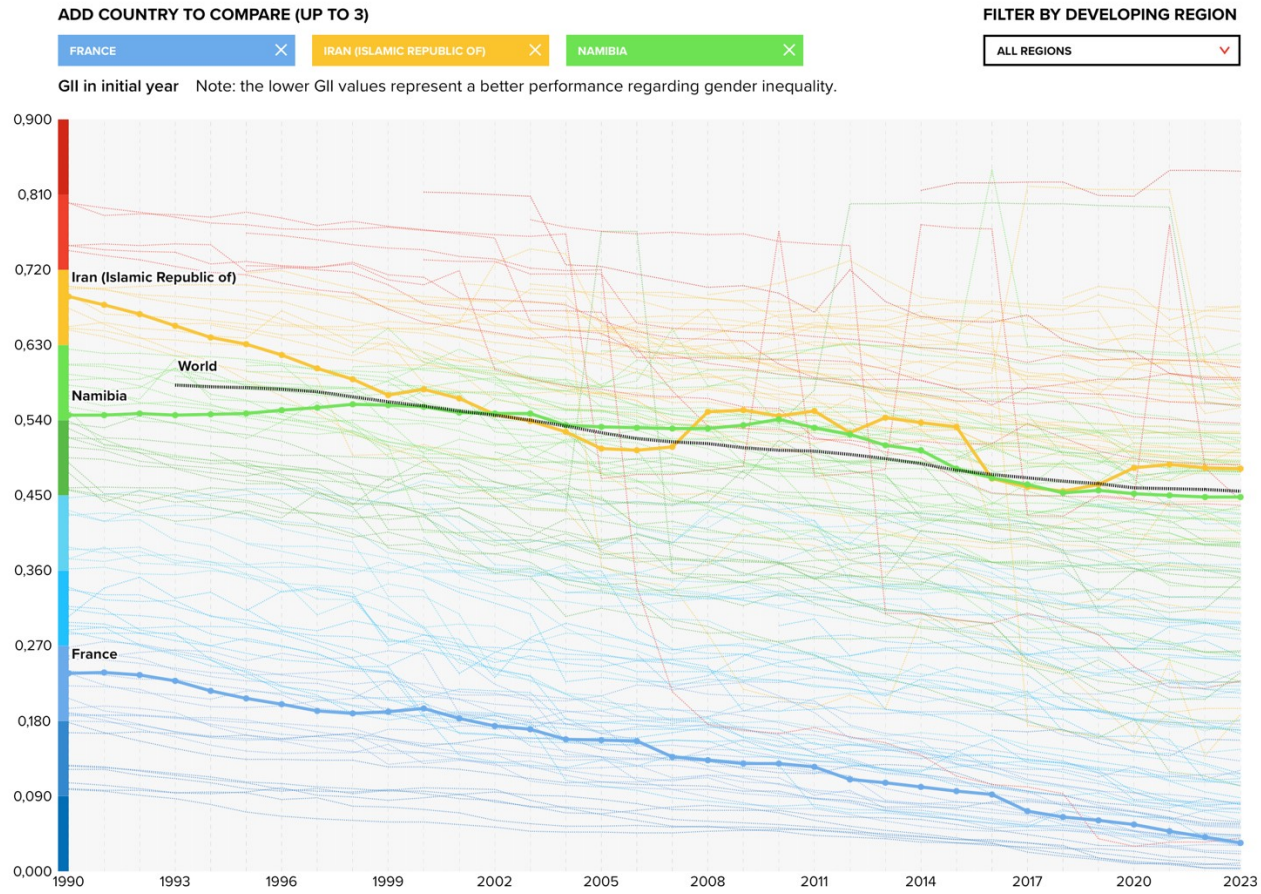

Figure1: Gender Inequality Index

This graph illustrates the evolution of the Gender Inequality Index (GII) from 1990 to 2023, comparing France, Iran and Namibia against the global average. Lower GII values indicate lower levels of gender inequality; while France has consistently improved and maintained comparatively low inequality, Iran and Namibia remain above the global average despite gradual progress, highlighting the persistent disparities in women's health, empowerment and labour market participation across different regions.

Commission on the Status of Women: UN body focused on gender equality and women's rights.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFP): The UNFP works to ensure access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, eliminate gender-based violence and support women's bodily autonomy.

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee): The CEDAW Committee is the independent body of experts responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). States that have ratified the Convention regularly report the Committee on their progress.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR): The OHCHR is responsible for promoting and protecting all internationally recognized human rights. It monitors discrimination against women, supports the implementation of human rights treaties such as CEDAW, and investigates violations of women's rights worldwide.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): UNESCO addresses harmful gender stereotypes, online hate speech and media literacy while promoting respectful and equal representation of women in communication and education.

V. Timeline of Events

1945: The Charter of the United Nations is signed, becoming the first international treaty to affirm the equal rights of women and men. It established gender equality as a fundamental principle of the United Nations.

1946: The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to document the status of women worldwide, monitor discrimination and recommend policies promoting women's political, economic, social and educational rights.

1979: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is adopted, requiring States Parties to regularly report on their progress in eliminating discrimination against women.

1993: The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women recognizes violence against women as a violation of human rights rather than a private or domestic matter.

1995: The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identifies violence, harmful stereotypes, unequal decision-making and discriminatory social norms a major barrier to achieving gender equality.

2000: UN Security Council Resolution 1325 highlights the importance of women's participation in peace and security while recognizing the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls.

2008: The United Nations Secretary-General launched the UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign to change public attitudes towards gender-based violence and promote its prevention through education, awareness-raising and international cooperation.

2010: UN Women is established, strengthening international efforts to address structural discrimination, harmful gender norms and resistance to women's rights.

2014: HeForShe is launched by UN Women, recognizing that men and boys play a crucial role in challenging harmful masculinities and supporting gender equality.

2015: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is adopted. Sustainable Development Goal 5 commits all Member States to achieving gender equality, while the agenda emphasizes the importance of reliable, gender-disaggregated data for measuring progress across all Sustainable Development Goals.

2020: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations reports a significant increase in domestic violence, online abuse and unequal care responsibilities, highlighting how crisis can intensify existing gender inequalities.

2022: The "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests in Iran draw international attention to growing resistance against women's rights and the risks faced by women advocating for equality. During the same period, UN agencies warn of increasing online misogyny, anti-rights movements and gender-based disinformation targeting women in public life.
2022- Present: The United Nations, UNESCO and UN Women report increasing concerns regarding online misogyny, gender-based disinformation, shrinking civic space and the underrepresentation of women in media, science and decision-making. At the same time, the UN continues to advocate for improved gender statistics, inclusive research and more balanced media representation to prevent setbacks in gender equality.
2025: During the 69th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) and the Beijing+30 Review, Member States assess persistent barriers to gender equality, including harmful gender stereotypes, shrinking civic space, online hate and the need to engage men and boys in promoting greater public support for women's rights.

VI. Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The United Nations has completed international frameworks aimed at addressing the social and cultural factors that are contributing to the discrimination against women. UN Women launched the HeForShe Campaign in 2014 to encourage men and boys to become active allies in promoting gender equality and challenging harmful gender stereotypes. Similarly, the UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign, initiated by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2008, seeks to prevent gender-based violence through education, public awareness and international cooperation. Additionally, the Generation Equality forum (2021) has brought together governments, civil society and the private sector to accelerate progress on gender equality through concrete commitments, while UNESCO has expanded initiatives promoting media literacy and combating online hate speech and misinformation. Despite these efforts, the United Nations continue to report increasing levels of online misogyny, gender-based disinformation and resistance towards women's rights in many parts of the world. Despite these efforts, greater public awareness and sustained international cooperation are still needed to counter attempts by patriarchal norms and anti-rights movements to undermine progress towards gender equality. Consequently, further international cooperation is needed to strengthen education for men and boys on the topic at hand and engage them in

supporting gender equality. Furthermore, the social aspects that contribute to the shrinking tolerance for women's rights need to be addressed adequately.

VII. Possible Solutions

Engaging Men and Boys as Partners in Gender Equality

Member States could expand programms that actively engage men and boys in promoting gender equality through schools, universities, workplaces and community initiatives. Campaigns promoting positive masculinity, respectful relationships shared responsibility can help challenge harmful gender stereotypes and reduce resistance towards women's rights.

Strengthening Education and Media Literacy

Governments may integrate gender equality, respectful communication and digital media literacy into national education systems. By addressing harmful stereotypes from an early age and teaching young people to critically evaluate online content, member states can help reduce the spread of misogyny, gender-based disinformation and anti-women's-rights narratives.

Combating Online Misogyny and Gender-Based Hate Speech

Member States could strengthen cooperation with digital platforms to improve the reporting, monitoring and removal of gender-based hate speech, harassment and disinformation, while ensuring that national legislation provides effective protection for women targeted by online abuse in accordance with international human right standards. Increased cooperation with social media platforms is essential to strengthen accountability and reduce the spread of misogynistic and harmful content online.

Promoting Public Awareness and Inclusive Dialogue

Governments, civil society organizations and international institutions should encourage open dialogue on changing gender roles through public awareness campaigns, community programmes and international cooperation by fostering constructive discussions and promoting equal participation in public life, Member States can reduce polarization and strengthen long-term public support for women's rights.

VIII. How to Prepare as a Delegate

This topic is primarily policy-oriented and requires delegates to develop a balanced understanding of the social, political and cultural factors contributing to the growing backlash against women's rights. To represent your assigned Member State effectively, research your country's position on gender equality, women's rights, civic participation, education and digital governance and consider whether it actively promotes gender equality or follows a more restrictive approach. Delegates are also encouraged to examine their country's voting record on relevant United Nations resolutions, identify countries with similar positions to build potential alliances during debate and investigate national efforts to address gender-based violence, online misogyny, harmful gender stereotypes and the engagement of men and boys in promoting gender equality. Throughout the debate, delegates should remain focused on identifying the underlying causes of the shrinking tolerance for women's rights and proposing solutions that foster dialogue, reduce polarization and strengthen long-term public support for gender equality. All delegates are required to submit at least one draft resolution and a minimum of two, preferably three, position papers covering the committee's topics by August 27th 2026.

IX. UN Resolutions

A/RES/76/142 (2021): https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/76/142
Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

A/RES/78/216 (2023): https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/78/216
Women in development, to promote women's equal participation in economic development to encourage gender-responsive economic policies.

A/RES/58/142 (2003): https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/58/142
Women, Peace and Security, recognizing the importance of women's participation in peace-building and protecting women from conflict-related violence.

S/RES/1820 (2008): https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/1820(2008)

Recognizes sexual violence as a tactic of war and demand stronger protection for women and girls in armed conflict while reinforcing women's rights within peace and security process.

A/RES/48/104 (1993): https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/48/104
Declaration on the elimination of Violence against Women, recognizing violence against women as a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

X. Useful Links

Insert links that might help the delegates with their research. PDF's with broader content or a YouTube videos explaining the issue might really benefit the delegates with their preparation. If there is a sub-topic concerning your issue that you only briefly touched upon you can also add a link so that the delegates could look into it more closely.

XI. Sources

Recommended Videos:
The Journey of Women's Rights: 1911-2015:
https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/videos/2015/03/the-journey-of-womens-rights-1911-2015

Feminism in times of war and peace:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIP8XHi9938

"Women's rights are being abused, threatened and violated around the world" - UN Chief at CSW67: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEYFL1h4gU8&t=5s

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW):
https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women

UN Women - United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women:
https://www.unwomen.org/en

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR):
https://www.ohchr.org/en/ohchr_homepage

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):
https://www.unesco.org/en

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):
https://www.unfpa.org

United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD):
https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW):
https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993):
https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-violence-against-women

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995):
https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/u1281/bdpfa_e.pdf

Sustainable Development Goal 5 – Gender Equality:
https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5
UN Women, Ending violence against Women:
https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women

Spotlight Initiative:
https://www.spotlightinitiative.org

UNFPA, engaging Men and Boys:
https://www.unfpa.org/engaging-men-and-boys

UNDP, gender social norms Index (GSNI)
https://hdr.undp.org/gender-social-norms-index

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) , gender equality:
https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/gender-equality.html

Amnesty International:
https://www.amnesty.org/en/

Center for Reproductive Rights:
https://reproductiverights.org

Equality Now:
https://equalitynow.org/

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF):
https://www.wilpf.org

Plan International:
https://plan-international.org

Figure1: Gender Inequality Index:

https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII

Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2024:
https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2024