



International Alliance of Women Alliance Internationale des Femmes

President's Newsletter Femicide

Dear all,

Last year, a group of members of the Board (Rosy, Helen, Bettina, Seema, Bashan, Asha, Jessika and me) decided that we had to do something about the increase across many countries of brutal attacks against women which surpass in barbarity the regrettably familiar incidents of rape and murder. It appears that in many of these cases the state and its administrators are not concerned and on occasions culpable. We decided to send a letter to the President of the Human Rights Council which was drafted by Helen Self in which we asked him to give femicide the urgency it deserves and discuss it during the 26th and if not possible give it priority in the 27th session of the Human Rights Council. Lyda Versteegen handed this letter to the office of the President of the HRC. Unfortunately, there was no follow up of this activity by the IAW. I circulate material from the UN and regional sources on femicide as food for thought, hoping that it will inspire some of us to undertake new activities on this subject.

Defining Femicide

Femicide (sometimes referred to also as feminicide or gender-related killing) is specifically defined as the killing of a woman because she is a woman, or the killing of a girl because she is a girl.¹ Femicide, according to the UN, is the extreme and ultimate manifestation of existing forms of violence against women in patriarchal societies. Crimes of this kind reinforce the idea that women are sexual objects and belong to men. For a case to be considered femicide, there must be an implied intention to carry out the crime, as well as a demonstrated connection between the crime and the gender of the victim.

“Femicide” was proposed as an alternative to the gender-neutral term of homicide which overlooks the realities of inequality and systematic violence against women. Femicides are also sometimes referred to as “crimes of passion” (predominantly in the European context), “honour killings” (mostly in the Middle East) or gendercide.²

The global extent of femicide is estimated at approximately 66,000 victims per year for the period between 2004 and 2009. This represents about almost one-fifth of all homicide victims for an average year. Violence against women is institutionalized to lesser or larger extents through family structures, social and economic frameworks, and cultural and religious traditions.

¹ <http://unstududies.org/about-unsa/acuns/acuns-vienna/projects/femicide>.

² http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/women_insecure_world.pdf.

² http://www.unicef.org/emerg/files/women_insecure_world.pdf.

Culturally and socially embedded, femicide continues to be tolerated or justified—with impunity as the norm. Due to the fact that it is so widely accepted, the targeted killing of women very often remains unrecognised, under-reported or neglected by governments.³

Forms of Femicide

Femicide refers to both the active/direct incident of the gender-related killing of women and girls, with clearly defined perpetrators, as well as its passive and indirect occurrence. Studies find that out of different forms of femicide, **intimate femicide – i.e., the killing of the woman by her male intimate partner – appears to be predominant.**

The **Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) in its 2013 report** defines 11 different forms of femicide: 1) The murder of women as a result of intimate partner violence, 2) The torture and misogynist slaying of women, 3) The killing of women and girls in the name of “honour”, 4) The targeted killing of women and girls in the context of armed conflict 5) The dowry-related killings of women; 6) Female infanticide and gender-based sex selection feticide; 7) Genital mutilation related femicide; 8) The killings of women due to accusations of sorcery and/or witchcraft 9) the Femicides associated with gangs, organized crime, drug dealers, human trafficking, and the proliferation of small arms; 10) The killing of aboriginal and indigenous women and girls because of their gender and finally, 11) The killing of women and girls because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.⁴

The **UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences** furthermore defines the death of girls or women from simple neglect, through starvation or ill-treatment; and deliberate acts or omissions by the State as forms of Femicide.⁵

UN General Assembly Resolution 68/191

According to the 1993 **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women**, violence against women "means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life". This definition fails to include explicitly violence that can lead to death and consequently misses an important component of violence against women.

The **UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** adopted in 1979 addresses all forms of violence which include the killing of women as acts of violence prohibited under international law. In December 2013, the UN General Assembly adopted **Resolution 68/191 on Taking action against gender-related killing of women and girls**. The Resolution reaffirms the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Convention on the

³ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/5/un-women-calls-for-urgent-and-effective-action-against-femicide>.

⁴ Details on the different forms of femicide can be found here: <http://acuns.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Claire-Laurent.pdf>.

⁵ http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session20/A.HRC.20.16_En.PDF.

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

It stresses the obligation of all states *to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, including women and girls*, and urges States to *strengthen national legislation, where appropriate, to punish violent gender-related killing of women and girls and to integrate specific mechanisms or policies to prevent, investigate and eradicate such deplorable forms of gender-based violence*.

The Resolution furthermore emphasises the *significance of the updated Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice as a way to assist countries in strengthening their national crime prevention and criminal justice capacities to respond to all forms of violence against women*.

The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights in its Resolution 1994/45, adopted on 4 March 1994, decided to appoint a Special Rapporteur on violence against women, including its causes and consequences. In May 2012, Rashida Manjoo, the current Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, submitted a report to the UN General Assembly addressing gender-related killings of women.⁶ The report specifies the existing international legal mechanisms and practices to identify, prevent and fight against femicide, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Furthermore, it highlights national practices such as the adoption of specific legislation, development of awareness-raising campaigns, and provision of training for professional groups for the effective prevention of these crimes.

While it is recognised that States have initiated preventive programmes, remaining challenges include a *“lack of overall societal transformation; inadequate provision of access to justice; the absence and/or insufficiency of the rights-based discourse when addressing the killings of women; and the blindness to structural inequalities and the complex intersecting relations of power in the public and private spheres, which remain the root causes of sex and gender discrimination”*.

Moreover, it argues that *“weaknesses in information systems and the poor quality of data are major barriers in investigating femicides, developing meaningful prevention strategies and advocating for improved policies”*. Hence, the report concludes that a more holistic approach to combatting femicide is needed which would address systemic discrimination, oppression and marginalization of women at the *political, operative, judicial and administrative levels*.

⁶ http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session20/A.HRC.20.16_En.PDF.

Regional Case Studies

i. Latin America

Increasing rates of violence against women have been reported across Latin America and of the 25 countries with the highest femicide rates, more than half are in the Americas.⁷ Research conducted by the UN Human Rights Office finds that the increase in organized crime, human trafficking, drug trafficking and the proliferation of small arms as major reasons for staggeringly high femicide rates.

According to a 2011 study, **El Salvador** has the highest and still increasing, rate of femicide in the world.⁸ According to women's rights groups, the killings are fuelled by impunity, machismo, and the weakness of a state that has failed to understand the magnitude of the problem.⁹

ii. United States

A study conducted by the Harvard School of Health (2002) shows that the **United States** has the highest rate of femicides among developing countries. The study found that although the United States accounted for 32 percent of female population among 25 high income countries, it accounted for 70 percent of all female homicides. Easy accessibility to weapons is said to contribute primarily to the high rates of femicide measures in the United States in comparison to other developed countries. Studies from the United States furthermore find that intimate Femicide rates are higher for Black and Hispanic women than for White women.¹⁰

iii. Europe

While figures for homicides have tended to fall in Europe in recent years, figures for domestic homicides – which are the cases that affect women the most – have not fallen. The European Commission **Daphne Project 2007-2013** included a research on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)-related mortality in Europe (EU27). The outcomes are alarming: the project suggests that in Europe there are approximately 3.500 IPV-related deaths every year, making for 9 deaths a day, 7 of whom are women and girls.¹¹

Furthermore, a **2013 working document of the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly** finds that “half of the women murdered in Germany died at the hands of their partner/spouse or former partner/spouse, while in France the number of women murdered in ‘domestic violence’ has risen in the last years by more than 20%. In Italy too, feminist organisations report a sustained increase in Femicide in recent years.¹²

⁷ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/EndingImpunityLAC.aspx>.

⁸ http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/GBAV2/GBAV2011_CH4_rev.pdf.

⁹ <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/04/impunity-machismo-fuel-femicides-in-el-salvador/>.

¹⁰ <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/Docs/Femicide%20Publication%202014%20FINAL.pdf>.

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/programmes-2007-2013/daphne/index_en.htm.

¹² http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/eurolat/committees/social/meetings/2013_07_16-17_vilnius/working_doc/ep/940344en.pdf.

iv. Asia

India's femicide is an old, complex and controversial phenomenon involving a myriad of interrelated factors. Research on the subject highlights that femicide in India also involves women as perpetrators of the crime. In general, femicide in India is linked to sex-selective feticide, female infanticide (one year and under), femicide of girls six years and under, dowry-related killing, honour killings, death-related abortions, killing of women due to the accusation of witch-craft and sorcery and suicides by women driven to kill themselves. In particular, research highlights economic factors as the root cause of sex-selective feticide and femicide of young girls in India.¹³

Documenting Femicide

It is of crucial importance to establish violence against women surveys as regular statistical exercises within all national statistical systems, thus ensuring regular and accurate monitoring of femicide cases. However, collecting correct data on femicide is challenging. In most countries, police and medical data-collection systems rarely have the necessary information or do not report the victim-perpetrator relationship or homicide's motives. Whilst in the United States, femicide research is abundant, European agencies have funded many initiatives on gender and violence but not specifically on femicide. Academic research on femicide, too, is still at infancy and often remains uncoordinated.

In Europe, **The Action** (a network supported by COST which is an intergovernmental framework for European Cooperation in Science and Technology, allowing the coordination of nationally-funded research on a European level) has now established "the first pan-European coalition on femicide with researchers already studying the phenomenon nationally. The aim of the project is to advance research clarity, agree on definitions, improve the efficacy of policies for femicide prevention, and publish guidelines for the use of national policy-makers."¹⁴

National documentation mechanisms in Europe are advancing as well. In the UK, for instance, the first census on women killed by men, called **Femicide Census**, was launched at a special conference in February 2015. The database includes a wide range of information about women who have been killed by fatal male violence, the perpetrators and the incident of murder itself.¹⁵

In response to the femicide crisis in Latin America, **ECLAC**, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, established an extensive database on murder cases of women by their intimate partners. The complete database is published and accessible via CEPALSTAT.¹⁶

The **Vienna Liaison Office of the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS)** has published a comprehensive series of reports on femicide and its different aspects. In 2013, ACUNS published its first report on Femicide, "**Femicide": A Global Issue that Demands Action**"¹⁷ and a Second Edition was published in 2014.

¹³ <http://acuns.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Femicide-Publication-2014-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁴ <http://www.femicide.net/>.

¹⁵ <http://www.womensaid.org.uk/page.asp?section=00010001001400130010#femcensus>.

¹⁶ <http://interwp.cepal.org/sisgen/ConsultaIntegrada.asp?idIndicador=1345&idioma=e>.

¹⁷ http://acuns.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Femicide_A-Gobal-Issue-that-demands-Action_1.pdf.

Both reports include an overview of existing resolutions and legal instruments established by UN bodies and the European Union, statements of high-ranking officials as well as selected country and regional reports on femicide.¹⁸ In March 2015, ACUNS published a third report called “**Femicide: Targeting of Women in Conflict – A Global Issue that demands Action**”.¹⁹

Action at the Latin American and European Level

In Latin America, the **Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women**, known as the **Belém do Pará Convention** was adopted in 1994. It contains specific obligations on States parties which must act with due diligence to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women, both in the public and private spheres. In the Convention, violence against women is defined as “any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere”, thus, recognising femicide.²⁰ Furthermore, the **UN Human Rights Office and UN Women** in 2014 created a **Model Protocol** for the independent investigation of gender-related killings in Latin America.²¹

In October 2007, the European Parliament adopted a **resolution on the murder of women (femicide) in Mexico and Central America** which specifies the role of the European Union in fighting the phenomenon.²² The EP has renewed its condemnation of femicide in its latest Annual Human Rights Report. Femicide is also mentioned in the **EU Guidelines on Violence against Women** adopted by the EU Council in December 2008.

The **Istanbul Convention adopted in 2011** presents the first official international treaty on violence against women at European level. The Convention contains specific obligations on countries in regard to violence against women and children, creating a common base that will lead to the adoption of similar laws and policies in the different countries. Although femicide/feminicide is not specifically mentioned in the Istanbul Convention, the Convention makes five important contributions to addressing femicide. First, the Convention includes a gender perspective throughout. Second, it helps end impunity for femicide/feminicide. A number of the offenses specified in the convention can be related to femicide/feminicide.

Physical violence in particular is defined to also encompass violence resulting in the death of the victim. Third, it sets off wide-ranging measures to prevent violence against women and domestic violence, protect the victims and punish the perpetrators. Fourth, it specifies concrete measures for the prevention of femicide (i.e. awareness raising, education, training of professionals).

Fifth, the Istanbul Convention provides for due diligence, the obligation of states to prevent, investigate, punish and provide reparations for acts of violence perpetrated by non-state actors.²³

¹⁸ Volume II is accessible via:

http://www.genevadeclaration.org/fileadmin/docs/Copublications/Femicide_A%20Gobal%20Issue%20that%20demands%20Action.pdf.

¹⁹ Volume III can be accessed via: http://acuns.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Femicide-III_Core-Stanzell.pdf.

²⁰ <https://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/docs/BelemDoPara-ENGLISH.pdf>.

²¹ <http://endviolence.un.org/pdf/LatinAmericanProtocolForInvestigationOfFemicide.pdf>.

²² The full document can be accessed on:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/eurolat/assembly/plenary_sessions/athens2014/adopted_docs/femicide/1026102en.pdf

²³ See ACUNS Report Vol I and <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/>.

In March 2014, the **Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly** passed a **Resolution on femicide in the European Union and Latin America** which calls for the application of joint action and efforts by Latin America and Europe, based on dialogue, cooperation and reciprocal exchange of best practices between countries in order to prevent, punish and eradicate it.²⁴

²⁴http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/eurolat/assembly/plenary_sessions/athens2014/adopted_docs/femicide/1026102en.pdf.