

5 April, 2022

Dear Members of the Consultative Group of the Human Rights Council (HRC),

The organizations and individuals signing this letter write to congratulate you as new members of the Human Rights Council Consultative Group (CG), and to encourage you to adopt measures to ensure that a woman is elected for the first time as the next Special Rapporteur on Torture (SRT).

In preparation of the 50<sup>th</sup> HRC's session, this CG will have the important responsibility of shortlisting and recommending candidates for key Special Procedure mandates, including the SRT.

Created in 1985, the SRT has had a fundamental role in upholding the absolute prohibition of torture, responding to complaints, overseeing conditions of detention throughout the world, and developing fundamental human rights standards and recommendations to promote accountability and torture prevention. Yet, none of the 6 experts who have held the role of Special Rapporteur has been a woman. This contributes to the wider underrepresentation of women across UN human right bodies and mechanisms, as documented recently in the [report](#) prepared by the Advisory Committee and adopted by the HRC on 21 May 2021<sup>1</sup>. This year the CG has the opportunity to correct this historic underrepresentation of women with respect to the SRT.

As concluded by the HRC's Advisory Committee in the above-mentioned report, the lack of gender balance in international bodies not only affects women's right to equality - particularly to have equal access to decision making positions and employment-, but it also erodes the effectiveness of the institutions and limits the range of issues and perspectives that should be part of their legal and political agenda<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the report recommends that the HRC and the CG take decisive and concrete measures to ensure that gender parity is achieved and sustained in the mandates they appoint.

Particularly, the report recommends that the CG should "*consider, when appropriate, a women-only list of candidates for Special Procedure mandates that have never been held by a woman*", and even to "*extend the deadline for calls for applications when not enough women candidates have applied*"<sup>3</sup>.

Consequently, to ensure that a woman holds this fundamental role for the first time in history, we respectfully request that, along with adhering to all the criteria that should guide the appointment of Special Procedure mandates, such as independence, impartiality, competence, expertise, and geographical and gender balance, the current

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<sup>1</sup> A/HRC/ 47/51, "Current levels of representation of women in human rights organs and mechanisms: ensuring gender balance", paras. 5-17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, paras. 18-41.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, para. 83.

members of the CG make a specific commitment to shortlisting only women candidates for the role of SRT.

This would not be the first time such a measure is taken by the CG, since in fact women-only lists of candidates were submitted by the CG during the HRC's 44<sup>th</sup> Session for the election of the current Special Rapporteurs on Health and Freedom of Expression<sup>4</sup>, also mandates that had never been held by a woman before.

Without adequate gender balance, the Special Procedures fail to be truly representative, to adequately reflect the values of equality and non-discrimination, and to reach their full potential of impact and effectiveness. The CG has a fundamental role in changing this, and its current members can decisively contribute to that goal by reverting the historic underrepresentation of women in one of the first mandates to be created. The nomination of an all-women shortlist for the position of SRT would send a strong message regarding the importance of upholding the principle of equal opportunity for women to compete in a fairer playing field.

We thank you for your attention and commitment to this issue and remain available to provide further information if needed.

Sincerely,

Organizations:

GQUAL Campaign

Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)

Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL)

Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)

Institute for African Women in Law (IAWL)

International Bar Association Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

International Institute on Race, Equality and Human Rights (Race & Equality)

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)

MENA Rights Group

Women's Link Worldwide

World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)

Individual endorsements:

Juan E. Méndez, former Special Rapporteur on Torture

Diego Rodríguez Pinzón, former member of the UN Committee Against Torture