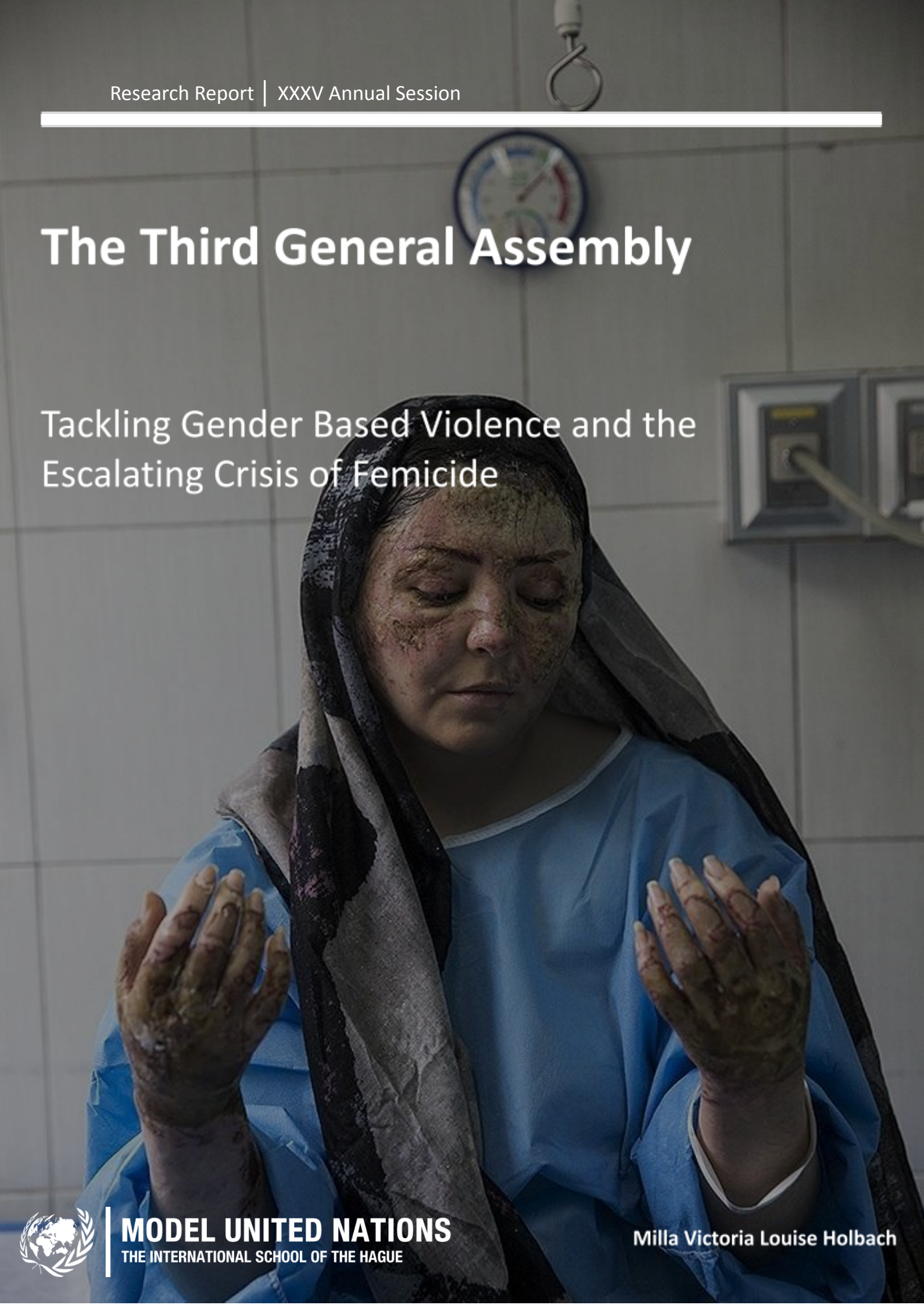
The Third General Assembly

Tackling Gender Based Violence and the Escalating Crisis of Femicide



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Introduction

The term *femicide* refers to the intentional killing of persons based on sex. Femicide often follows a pattern of escalating abuse, making early intervention crucial. It is rarely an isolated act of violence but rather the final outcome of sustained psychological, physical, or sexual abuse. Warning signs are frequently overlooked or dismissed by institutions and communities alike. It often occurs alongside various other forms of violence in settings such as the workplace, schools, or other public spaces, including all types of harassment, sexual violence, and intimate partner abuse. Such violence is facilitated by world wide discrimination against women and girls, fortified by unequal power relations, gender stereotypes or harmful social, cultural, religious norms. Marginalized women including Indigenous women, migrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, women with disabilities, and those living in poverty are especially vulnerable, as overlapping forms of discrimination limit their access to protection, justice, and support services. These inequalities exacerbate their risk of experiencing extreme forms of gender-based violence (GBV), including femicide. According to a UN study authored by the UN office of drugs and crime, femicide accounts for more than 60% of female homicide, demonstrating the gravity of the situation on a global scale. In many areas of the world, femicide is not legally recognized as a distinct crime, which results in inadequate data collection, weak legal responses, and an overall lack of accountability for perpetrators. Institutional failures, such as lack of responsiveness from law enforcement, victim-blaming attitudes, and systemic underfunding of support services further entrench impunity and discourage victims from seeking help.

Definition of Key Terms

Criminal offence

A criminal offence is an act or an omission that is unlawful and punishable by laws of a state or a country. Typically an act which is forbidden, due to the harm it causes to an individual, individuals, a community, a society or the state. Some criminal offences are international.

Femicide / Feminicide

the killing of a woman or girl, through a man and on based on her gender.

Gender-based violence (GBV)/ Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

“violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately” (european Commission)

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

VAWG is a pervasive violation of human rights, It encompasses a range of harmful acts, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence, often perpetrated by intimate partners or others. Including offenses as grave as human trafficking or femicide.

Intimate partner violence (IPV)

IPV is an abuse or aggression which occurs in an intimate or romantic relationship, which typically leverages unhealthy power dynamics.

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)

SRGBV are acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms

Abuse

A broad term referring to the misuse of power to control, harm, or exploit another person. It can take many forms physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, or economic and often occurs in relationships characterized by an imbalance of power.

Sexual violence

Any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act through coercion, force, or threats, regardless of the relationship between victim and perpetrator. It includes both physical and non-physical acts that violate a person's sexual autonomy. Eg: sexual harassment, rape, etc

Domestic violence

A pattern of abusive behavior in an intimate or familial relationship used to gain or maintain power and control over the other person. Also described as IPV.

Patriarchy

In terms of feminism, patriarchy refers to the system in which men as a group are constructed as superior to women as a group, thus having authority and sometimes even ownership over them.

Misogyny

"dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women." (Oxford languages)

Gender inequality

the unequal treatment and opportunities of a person due to their gender

Toxic masculinity

toxic masculinity is used in modern media to refer to the aspects of hegemonic masculinity which are socially destructive towards all genders as well as often the perpetrator themselves.

Impunity

exemption from punishment or freedom from the injurious consequences of an action. Often the offender is aware of this impunity and will act accordingly

Justice gaps

"The justice gap can be understood as the number of people who have at least one unmet justice need" (world justice project)

Capacity building

evolving and harnessing the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in this case against gender-based violence, abuse and transgressions.

General Overview

The sociocultural precedent to femicide

Femicide is the tragic result of a long-standing sociocultural foundation which normalizes, excuses, and even facilitates violence against women. A focal precedent to femicide lies in the historical normalization of GBV, where patriarchal systems have long sanctioned male control over women's bodies, behavior, and autonomy. Throughout history, legal and social institutions have not only been ineffective in protecting women but often reinforced the idea that their lives are less valuable. In many societies, domestic violence was traditionally, culturally regarded as a private matter, and men were seen as having disciplinary rights over their wives and daughters. In some cultures, even murder could be justified under the guise of protecting familial “honor.” For example, in Jordan, Article 340 of the Penal Code allows a man to receive a reduced sentence or exemption from punishment if he kills a female relative in a so-called "honourable" rage, while Article 98 grants leniency for crimes committed in a “fit of fury.” Providing the legal groundwork to reinforce a culture of violence towards women. These provisions have enabled what Fadia Faqir calls intrafamily femicide, with courts typically giving minimal sentences to male perpetrators. In some cases, women who are at risk of honour-based violence are incarcerated not for a crime but "for their own protection," while their aggressors remain free. This normalization has laid the groundwork for contemporary femicide, making it possible for acts of extreme violence to be perceived not as abnormalities, but as extensions of culturally accepted male dominance.

Equally critical is the influence of deeply ingrained cultural misogyny and rigid gender norms in most societies. Which creates the ideological conditions for femicide to flourish. Societies that equate masculinity with aggression, dominance, and control while defining femininity as submissive, passive, and nurturing contribute to a toxic power dynamic where violence becomes a tool to reinforce dominance. From an early age, gender roles are taught through family, media, religion, and education, shaping beliefs about what is "acceptable" male and female behavior. These social constructs promote the belief that men are entitled to obedience and emotional or sexual access. Women who defy such expectations by asserting independence, rejecting partners, or speaking out are seen as threats to male authority and thus to social cohesion, they are often rejected from their communities and often face retribution. This is reflected in the widespread prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV), which includes physical violence, sexual coercion, psychological aggression, and stalking. An attempt to silence or correct women to return them to their “rightful” place in social

hierarchies. According to data from the CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, over 41% of women in the U.S. have experienced physical or sexual violence or stalking by an intimate partner, and more than half of all female homicide victims are killed by a current or former male partner. This data demonstrates at which scale gender-based violence functions, as both a personal and systemic mechanism of social control. The roots of this violence often begin in adolescence 16 million women reported their first experience of IPV before the age of 18. They are reinforced by societal narratives such as "Boys will be Boys" that excuse male violence as natural or provoked. Leading to a lack of awareness or courage to stand up to misogyny from a young age. As a result, femicide becomes a potent enforcement of gender hierarchies, punishing women who transgress them and reaffirming the notion that male authority must be defended at all costs.

Traditional institutions such as family and religion often act as both passive and active agents in perpetuating the conditions for femicide. In many households, patriarchal family structures reinforce gender inequality from within the home. Religion, depending on interpretation and cultural integration, can either challenge or sustain systems of oppression. In many contexts, religious teachings have been used to justify male authority, female modesty, and women's duty to submit to men and social gender norms, creating a moral framework that absolves or excuses abusive behavior. Furthermore, traditional practices like dowries, forced marriages, and "chastity policing" fortify the idea that women are property or symbols of familial honor. In Bangladesh, World Bank survey data shows that dowry solicitation and domestic violence rank among the top five most common crimes reported nationwide, yet more than half of affected households took no action, with many avoiding formal institutions like police or courts altogether, suggesting a high number of unreported cases, women and girls who did not receive the moderate amount of justice they could have been offered. Such dowry practices across multiple countries, including Indonesia, reflect persistent patriarchal norms, reducing women's (often young women) autonomy and entrenching gender inequality in marital relationships. Despite symbolic meanings in some contexts, dowry systems often operate as mechanisms of control and coercion that compromise women's basic human rights and safety. These institutions, when left unchallenged, create a moral and structural justification for the erasure of women who violate patriarchal norms.

Lastly, the silence and complicity of society play a powerful role in creating the social climate where femicide is not only possible but frequent. Cultural taboos around discussing gender-based violence, combined with encouraged systemic victim-blaming, often deter survivors from speaking out and communities from intervening. When women are blamed for their own abuse because of how they

dressed, where they went, or whom they trusted they are symbolically criminalized for their own victimhood. This fuels a culture of fear and shame, further isolating victims. In many cases, community members or institutions such as police or medical professionals downplay reports of abuse or murder, treating them as unfortunate but inevitable events rather than human rights violations. In the European Union, only 14% of women report their most serious incident of intimate partner violence (IPV) to the police, despite one in five women experiencing physical or sexual violence from a current or former partner. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) also estimates the economic cost of IPV against women in the EU to be nearly €152 billion annually, underscoring the far-reaching impact of this violence. The low reporting rate reveals the broader failure to support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. This principle may be applied internationally as there are countries where these numbers are significantly lower. This collective silence signals to young girls that women's lives are expendable, and their deaths unworthy of outrage, further perpetuating a global vicious cycle where women's lives are the cost.

GBV across different continents

GBV is a systemic and global issue deeply rooted in cultural traditions, legal frameworks, and overlapping social inequalities. Its manifestations differ across continents, yet creates a pattern: cultural narratives normalizing violence against women, legal systems that enable or excuse it, and marginalized identities that face compounded risks. By examining the cultural justifications for GBV, the complicity of legal institutions, and the layered vulnerabilities created by race, class, sexuality, and ability, we can understand the full extent of the forces that sustain and reproduce GBV globally.

Across continents, culturally sanctioned practices and norms create environments in which GBV is either tolerated or justified. In Africa, traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), bride price, and wife inheritance continue in parts of Somalia, Kenya, and Nigeria. These practices reflect the control of women's sexuality and bodies, but are defended as essential to cultural identity or family honor despite the price women must pay. In South Asia, particularly in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, dowry-related violence and honor killings persist despite legal bans. Women are attacked or killed for bringing insufficient dowry or for acting against family expectations in matters of marriage or dress. Although dowry killings in India are reported to have declined, the most recent statistic being 6450 dowry related deaths in 2022. Professionals working with victims and concerned communities suggest the actual number is likely much higher as some are simply reported as suicide

or accidental deaths. Neighbouring country Pakistan is in a similar situation, where a ssdo report reported over 500 honour killings with a conviction rate as low as 2%.

In Latin America, the concept of machismo reinforces the idea that men are naturally dominant and emotionally volatile, which is used to justify domestic violence as an expression of passion rather than a crime. In Europe, while overtly violent practices may be less common in the mainstream, marginalized groups like Romani women experience GBV driven by cultural patriarchy, combined with racism and exclusion. In North America, particularly in Indigenous communities, the lingering impact of colonialism and forced assimilation has dismantled traditional social structures and led to epidemic levels of violence against Indigenous women. In Oceania, especially in Papua New Guinea and parts of the Pacific Islands, GBV is normalized in communities where bride price systems and strict gender roles continue to reduce women to property.

These culturally embedded forms of violence are often reinforced by legal systems that either protect perpetrators or fail to adequately support victims. In several Middle Eastern and North African countries, penal codes still include “marry-your-rapist” clauses, allowing perpetrators to escape punishment if they marry their victims. This reflects the societal obsession with female purity and family honor, placing the burden of shame on the survivor. In 2014 Moroccan Article 475 was repealed to cut this exemption from the Moroccan penal code, following the tragic death of the 16 year old Amina, who took her own life as a result of her forced marriage to her rapist.

In Latin America, despite recent legal advances like Mexico’s and Argentina’s femicide laws, impunity remains high, with low conviction rates and underfunded enforcement agencies. Similarly, in South Asia, marital rape is still legal in many countries, including India, despite advocacy from women’s groups. Even where laws exist, such as in Sub-Saharan Africa, customary courts often override statutory law, prioritizing community reconciliation over justice. In the United States and Canada, Indigenous women experience disproportionately high rates of GBV and extremely low prosecution rates, particularly on reservations or in rural areas. Indigenous peoples not only report higher rates of sexual assault altogether, in particular 56% of women experience sexual violence in their lifetime. This violence originated through the systematic oppression and dismantling of ancestral gender hierarchies during the colonisation of America, in order to destabilise indigenous cultural unity.

The failure of legal systems cannot be divorced from the reality that GBV disproportionately affects women who already live at the margins. Intersectionality, a framework coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw,

highlights how overlapping identities such as race, ethnicity, class, ability, and sexuality create heightened vulnerability. For example, Black and Indigenous women across the Americas are far more likely to experience GBV, yet face structural racism when seeking protection. In Australia, Aboriginal women are hospitalized for assault at rates far exceeding that of non-Indigenous women.

Migrant and refugee women often endure violence in transit, in detention centers, or in households where immigration status becomes a tool of control by abusers. These women may not report abuse out of fear of deportation or legal retaliation. Similarly, LGBTQ+ individuals, especially transgender women of color, face extraordinarily high rates of sexual and physical violence, often with little to no legal recourse. Women with disabilities, especially those reliant on caretakers, are particularly vulnerable to abuse, and may have no means of reporting without jeopardizing their basic care.

The cumulative effect of these cultural, legal, and social dynamics is a world in which GBV is both predictable and preventable, yet still largely unaddressed. The cultural legitimization of violence, legal systems that either enable perpetrators or exclude victims, and intersectional inequalities form a global infrastructure that protects patriarchy while abandoning the most vulnerable. Combatting GBV, therefore, requires more than reactive policies or symbolic laws; it demands a fundamental transformation of cultural narratives, legal institutions, and the global distribution of power and justice.

Major Parties Involved

UN Human Rights Council

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) plays a critical role in monitoring and addressing human rights violations, including gender-based violence and femicide. It conducts special sessions, appoints independent experts such as the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, and issues reports urging states to implement protective laws. The UNHRC promotes accountability and highlights systemic violence through resolutions and recommendations grounded in international human rights law.

UN office on Drugs and Crime

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) supports member states with research, data collection, and policy guidance on violence against women, including femicide. Through reports like the Global Study on Homicide, UNODC provides critical evidence of the scale and patterns of femicide worldwide, informing targeted interventions and law enforcement training to improve prevention and prosecution.

UN Women

UN Women is the UN entity dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment, with a mission to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. It leads global advocacy, capacity-building, and program implementation, partnering with governments and civil society. UN Women's flagship initiatives include the "Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces" program and promoting implementation of CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe operates primarily through the Istanbul Convention, the first legally binding regional treaty aimed specifically at preventing violence against women and domestic

violence. It monitors implementation via GREVIO, an independent expert body ensuring state compliance and offering policy recommendations.

Organization of American States (OAS)

The Organization of American States (OAS) champions women's rights through the Belém do Pará Convention, the first binding inter-American instrument on violence against women. The OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights actively monitors abuses and promotes legal reforms.

The African Union (AU)

The African Union (AU) addresses GBV and femicide through the Maputo Protocol, which guarantees women's rights and calls for the eradication of violence. The AU Commission works with member states to harmonize laws and implement prevention programs, reinforcing cultural shifts toward gender equality.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
April 1801	First known use of the term "femicide" by John Corry in *A Satirical View of London*, referring generally to the killing of a woman.
March 1976	Feminist scholar Diana E.H. Russell reintroduces the term "femicide" at the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Brussels
December 8th 1979	UN adopts the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*
December 6th 1989	Montreal Massacre in Canada
June 23rd 1993	UN General Assembly adopts the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW)*.
June 9th 1994	*Belém do Pará Convention* enters into force (Inter-American Convention on Violence Against Women).
September 13th 1994	*Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)* passed in the U.S
September 15th 1995	*Beijing Platform for Action* adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women.
July 11th 2003	*Maputo Protocol* adopted by the African Union.
February 1st 2007	Mexico passes General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence.
April 9th 2008	Guatemala criminalizes femicide through Decree 22-2008.
May 11th 2011	*Istanbul Convention* opened for signature by the Council of Europe.
April 1th 2012	Argentina adopts femicide as an aggravating factor in its Penal Code.
August 2012	Australia launches *Our Watch* for national prevention of violence against women.

September 2012	*Counting Dead Women Australia* project launched by Destroy the Joint.
December 16th 2012	Delhi gang rape case occurs in India
March 21st 2013	India passes the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, expanding definitions of sexual violence.
January 2015	*We Will Stop Femicide Platform* becomes a major movement in Turkey.
May 23rd 2015	*Ni Una Menos* protest begins in Argentina.
May 25th 2015	Nigeria passes the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act.
October 6th 2015	Pakistan passes the Anti-Honor Killing Bill.
October 2015	*My Stealthy Freedom* gains momentum in Iran.
May 23rd 2016	South Korea's Gangnam Station femicide sparks mass protests.
July 15th 2016	Qandeel Baloch honor killing in Pakistan prompts global media attention.
August 2016	*Flower Demo Movement* emerges in Japan in response to court dismissals of sexual assault.
November 2017	*Aurat March* begins organizing across cities in Pakistan.
June 3rd 2019	Canada releases *MMIWG Report*, declaring missing and murdered Indigenous women as victims of genocide.
March 20th 2021	Turkey announces withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.
November 2022	New Zealand enacts reforms to its Family Violence Act.
June 24th 2022	Roe v Wade is overturned

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), December 18, 1979 (General Assembly Resolution 34/180)
- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), December 20, 1993 (General Assembly Resolution 48/104)
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, September 15, 1995 (Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, UN Document A/CONF.177/20)
- Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, October 31, 2000 (S/RES/1325)
- Security Council Resolution 1820 on Sexual Violence in Conflict, June 19, 2008 (S/RES/1820)
- Security Council Resolution 1888 on Protection of Civilians from Sexual Violence, September 30, 2009 (S/RES/1888)
- Security Council Resolution 1960 on Monitoring and Reporting Sexual Violence in Conflict, December 16, 2010 (S/RES/1960)
- Security Council Resolution 2106 on Sexual Violence in Conflict, June 24, 2013 (S/RES/2106)
- Security Council Resolution 2467 on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Women's Participation in Peace Processes, April 23, 2019 (S/RES/2467)
- General Assembly Resolution on Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, December 19, 2006 (A/RES/61/143)

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