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CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

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All over the world, there has been a rise of extremist and terrorist groups and it is very clear this violence is particularly targeted against women and girls. Rising extremism and terrorism in many areas of the world are linked with geopolitics, systemic inequalities, militarism, displacement and other political and social factors. They have disastrous consequences for human rights, gender justice and women's equality.

I would like to make 3 points in this intervention.

First gender inequality is key to what is happening to women and girls as victims of extremism and terrorism

Secondly not only non-state-actors but also states themselves use arguments based on religion, culture and tradition to justify violence and discrimination against women and girls

Third investing in gender equality, equal rights and opportunities, empowerment of women and women's organisations is absolutely necessary to fight violent extremism in the long run.

First the issue of why women and girls are often the first victims of terrorism and extremism. This is not by accident, it is deeply rooted in gender inequality and the discrimination of women and girls all over the world. So my point is that it is all about unequal rights, about injustice, about superiority versus inferiority. If you don't look at the other as an equal human being but as an inferior one, it is so much

easier to treat the other as an object, as something you can use for your own pleasure or wishes. It's exactly that kind of reasoning that has led to slavery or to the holocaust in the past, and it is that same kind of reasoning that leads today to racism or to refuse refugees fleeing from terror and war, to enter Europe. This is also the reason why sexual violence and rape is so widespread in the world. In this respect using sexual violence and rape as a method of war is only a small step. Expressing concern and condemning the use of sexual violence as tactic of war is not enough. It takes strong commitment and willful action.

Secondly not only non-state-actors but also states themselves use arguments based on religion, culture and tradition to justify violence and discrimination against women and girls. In the media there is often the focus on armed groups such Lord resistance Army, Boko Haram, IS, Al Quada... but also states themselves dare using their army or police against their own citizens as in Sudan or Syria. States can also facilitate terrorism or extremism by guilty absence, by not interfering, by tolerating illegal trafficking in weapons or raw materials used to finance wars and violence, by taking no measures to protect women or girls against crimes, by installing a system of impunity, by not offering any legal protection to the victims, by not punishing crimes of their own citizens in the peace corps when they commit sexual crimes. Here is a role for parliamentarians to lobby and advocate against impunity. Indeed terrorism leads to a violation of human rights especially for women and girls, we talk about murder, kidnapping, slavery, sale, forced marriages, human trafficking, sexual slavery a.s.o. This escalation of violence leads to massive migration, millions of people on the run. During migration again women and girls are extremely vulnerable and often victims of more violence.

My third point is the necessity of investing in the empowerment of women and girls as a barrier against extremism and terrorism. Equal opportunities and equal rights, getting the possibilities to study, to inherit land, to start a business... are key to a real democratic society with respect for human rights. This is exactly what the Sustainable

Development Goals want to obtain when they recognize that achieving gender equality and women's empowerment are a prerequisite for real sustainable development. But for the SDGs to make a real difference in the lives of women and girls, governments must increase financial commitment to gender equality and women's rights by funding women's rights organisations and gender programs at all levels, from community to global.

We as parliamentarians can play a role to stop violence against women caused by extremism and terrorism by

- doing advocacy for gender equality and the implementation of the UN resolution 1325 that already 15 years ago linked the disproportionate impact of conflict on women to the maintenance of international peace and security
- mobilizing humanitarian aid for refugees, counteract stigmatization of survivors of violence and help them rebuild their lives
- preventing recruiting for terrorist groups through information and education and through social and economic initiatives directed at those at risk
- holding perpetrators accountable for their crimes

We can no longer accept that women continue to be excluded and marginalised, their rights ignored and their voices sidelined. Because like a canary in a coalmine, this violation of women's rights go hand in hand with violence against men, children, nations, communities and our world. We must not wait for the international community to act. We are the international community!

Without empowered women there will be no peace. There will be no peace without development. There will be no development without women. There will be no peace without women. Women power is peace power.

