

Oral statement by COSPE, CCPR, SALC, Swaziland Domestic Workers Union, Swaziland Rural Women Assembly, The Rock of Hope, Women and Law Southern Africa- Eswatini, Gcama Mfati, Voice of Voices, SOS Swaziland

Item 3 – Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women

41st session of the Human Rights Council

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ESWATINI

Thank you, Chairperson.

On behalf of the co-signing organisations from Eswatini, in partnership with COSPE, CCPR and SALC, I would like to congratulate the 25 years of work of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

Eswatini has ratified major international and regional instruments on women's rights, receiving a number of recommendations to combat discrimination and violence against women. Significant progress has been made as to the national legal framework, notably by the enactment of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act in 2018.

However, patriarchal stereotypes and harmful customary practices perpetuate the prevailing situation. In 2017, the Human Rights Committee expressed concern at reports of widespread violence against women and children in Eswatini.

According to a national study, 48% of women between the ages of 13-24 years reported having experienced some form of sexual violence. 1 in 3 girls experience some form of sexual violence before the age of 18 years. In a country with the highest HIV /AIDS prevalence in the world, sexual gender-based violence is one of the key contributors of new HIV infections.

Sexual harassment in the workplace remains a concern. We are particularly worried about the many women and girls in Eswatini employed as domestic workers in private households. According to the Swaziland Domestic Workers Union records, they are among the most exploited and sexually abused workers. Sex workers also remain a group with limited access to justice when they have been physically or sexually abused, which is reported to occur to 40% of them by clients, family members and police officers.

The signatory organisations therefore call on the Special Rapporteur on Violence against women to:

- Monitor Eswatini's implementation of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act.
- Monitor and encourage the enactment of laws which strengthen women's access to land and marital property and reduce their risk of gender-based violence.