General Assembly holds interactive dialogue with Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women

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On October 10, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Rashida Manjoo, presented her first written report to the Third Committee at the 66th session of the General Assembly. Ms. Manjoo opened by giving a summary of her report on the continuum of violence against women from the home to the transnational sphere: the challenges of effective redress. The meeting was then opened for comments and questions from delegations. Overall, the dynamic of the discussions during the interactive dialogue was friendly, with most delegations welcoming the Special Rapporteur’s work and report.

The Special Rapporteur highlighted that States must meet their efforts to address violence against women through legislative, policy and capacity building activities, and that these efforts must address the structural causes of violence at all levels of society. Ms. Manjoo proposed a holistic approach to understanding and addressing discrimination and violence against women. The approach has four main recommendations: treating rights as universal, interdependent and indivisible; understanding that violence is situated along a continuum both in terms of time and location; recognizing the existence of structural and institutional inequalities related to both individual and structural discrimination; and understanding the ways in which inter- and intra-gender differences exist.

The Special Rapporteur also reported on the country visits she undertook to Algeria, Zambia and the United States of America. During the interactive dialogue, the most contentious exchanges focused on the section of the Special Rapporteur’s report on “Violence against Women perpetrated and condoned by states”. The delegation from Zambia in particular was not pleased with the mention of their country in this context, commenting that Zambia state neither perpetrates nor condones any form of violence against women. Ms Manjoo replied that the reference to perpetration and condoning was to violence by state actors in custodial settings such as prisons and the failure of the state to protect women from acts of violence with impunity.

A recurring issue discussed during the interactive dialogue was the dire need for education in terms of changing mindsets regarding violence against women. Delegations from Australia, Niger and Cameroon in particular stressed this need. The Special Rapporteur reaffirmed the need for education and also stressed the need for decentralized services and sufficient allocation of resources.

Various delegations also commented on thematic issues relating to violence against women. For instance, Sierra Leone, whose delegation stated that their country has an 80% incidence of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) appealed for a concerted effort to eradicate FGM. The U.S. delegation commended the Special Rapporteur on her inclusion of refugees and displaced women in her report and urged her to follow up on the issue and come up with effective interventions.