

International Experts Support Model Law Initiative to Combat Online Gender-Based Violence.

Washington DC, December 8, 2023. Over 70 experts in gender, law, cybersecurity, freedom of expression, digital platforms, and human rights, among other fields, expressed their support for the initiative presented by the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) in collaboration with a coalition of States, international cooperation agencies and civil society organizations, aiming to create a Model Law to foster efforts to regulate technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

This was the main conclusion of the regional event "*Towards a Comprehensive Model Law to Prevent, Sanction, and Eradicate Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence Against Women Facilitated by Technologies: Tools and Proposals for Regional Regulation. The Continuum of Violence*," organized by the MESECVI with the support of the Republic of Italy, Equality Now, and CICTE. The event took place on November 30 and December 1 at the OAS headquarters in Washington DC.

The meeting marked the beginning of the efforts to develop the aforementioned Model Law with the contribution of the participants at the event. The project is driven by a broad global alliance that includes the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), Equality Now, the Republic of Italy, CICTE, UN Women, the European Union EUROsocial program, the Wilson Center, the Regional Alliance for Freedom of Expression and Information, UNFPA, UNESCO, and civil society organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean.

During two days of collective reflection, the challenges involved in regulating the various manifestations of violence instigated by new technologies, which affect women and girls in their online and offline interactions, were discussed in depth.

The discussions began with the testimonies of women who have been victims of digital violence in different aspects of their lives, both private and public, illustrating how these attacks are inserted and perpetuate the ongoing structural violence against women.

In the face of the rapid pace at which technology is advancing, experts highlighted the importance of conceptualizing digital violence within the framework of international human rights law and the principles established by the Belém do Pará Convention, as well as other instruments protecting women's rights, such as the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW, among others. This lays the groundwork for regulation at the global, regional, and national levels.

Through various panels, topics related to addressing such violence were discussed, including the tensions between its regulation and freedom of expression,

intersectionality and its impact on women in situations of greater vulnerability, the role of digital platforms in its prevention and sanction, and the challenges in investigating, prosecuting, and penalizing.

In this regard, the importance of focusing not only on punitive measures but also on developing coordinated national and transnational prevention and protection policies was emphasized. Likewise, there was an insistence on the need to involve the private sector in regulatory efforts. A call was also made to work towards creating safe and inclusive digital spaces where women and girls can participate and make their voices heard without fear of being attacked, humiliated, and silenced.

This high-level regional meeting takes place on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the Belém do Pará Convention, the first international treaty that recognized women's right to a life free from violence. In this context, the Model Law project embraces the principles of the Convention to establish the highest standards of protection, guiding countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to develop their own legislation and public policies against online gender-based violence.

This meeting marks the beginning of a process of regional consultations that will continue throughout 2024 and through which it is hoped to involve various sectors and organizations in the region to prepare the draft of the Comprehensive Model Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Technology-Facilitated Violence against Women. This draft will then be presented to the Committee of Experts of the MESECVI for final approval.