DOMESTIC/FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THE COVID-19 ERA

18-20 November, 2020 International Virtual Summit

Concept Note

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As COVID-19 has done with humanity’s other existentially multigenerational threats and challenges, so has it mercilessly ripped open our assumptions regarding how we live with each other in general, and at our homes in particular.

In fact, worldwide “sheltering in place” — the primary structural protective measure against COVID-19 — has rendered an untold number of already vulnerable individuals and groups not only more dangerously defenseless but, when unable to flee or seek help, also voiceless and hopeless. Closed off from the outside, those experiencing domestic/family violence have been deprived of their ordinarily available, or at least accessible, external support and preventive systems, such as caring family members, friends, and neighbors, schools, shops, law enforcement, healthcare, places of worship, and other community centers’ personnel. Locked inside, sometimes with no means of escape or even contact with the outside, they have been trapped with their perpetrators. Were escape even possible, it would put them at risk for contracting the deadly novel coronavirus.

Potential perpetrators too are now deprived of their own usual means of maintaining their self-esteem, coping with, and mastering life’s challenges, be they income, status, work structure, physical exertion and sports, and outside family and camaraderie. For the most part, many cultures not only stereotypically glorify power and control, but denigrate closeness, dependency, tenderness, vulnerability and ambiguity. Moreover, very rarely do most cultures provide (potential) perpetrators with non-violent means of managing such emotions, especially in
themselves, nor of coping with frustration, disappointment, conflict, weakness, and pent-up aggression. This perpetrator-victim power dynamic thus serves to compensate for the perpetrator’s own sense of powerlessness and inadequacy by rendering the other (e.g., intimate partner, child, elderly parent, the disabled, LGBTQ individuals and those in overcrowded living conditions living), even more vulnerable. (Futebol Viral at Summit: https://www.culturalagents.org/futebol-viral)

Indeed, warnings and reports of a significant rise in rates of individuals exposed to domestic violence during COVID-19 around the world have been alarming. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that three months of quarantine will result in a 20 percent rise of intimate partner violence (IPV) – predicting at least 15 million additional cases of IPV will occur around the world as a result of COVID-19.¹ This follows the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s report that globally, 58 percent of female homicide victims are killed by an intimate partner or family member.² While rates of reported IPV have been rising throughout the world, the opposite is true for children. In the United States, rates of reported child abuse have declined by anywhere from 51 to 94 percent as compared to the rates of reported cases in previous years.³ Given that in most countries more than 2 in 3 children experience violent discipline by caregivers⁴ (the most common form of violence to which children are subjected⁵), this decline in reporting is of great concern. Older individuals comprise another population facing increased rates of abuse. Prior to COVID-19, 10 to 15 percent of all people over the age of 60 were subjected to abuse each year,⁶ while less than 5 percent of cases were actually reported.⁷ Now, not only are older adults at a heightened risk from coronavirus, but

they must also navigate the difficulties imposed by lockdown measures, other forms of social isolation, and discrimination. Moreover, particularly when isolated at home/s, like women, children, and elderly individuals, people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ population face a much higher risk of discrimination and violence than their non-disabled and non-LGBTQ peers. Adults with disabilities are 1.5 times more likely to be the victim of violence, while children with disabilities are 4 times more likely to be the victim of violence. This risk is exacerbated when they experience mental and/or intellectual impairments as well. In the United States, over 67 percent of LGBTQ youth isolating with their families report identity-related abusive home environments. Endangered outside the home, they comprise 40 percent of the homeless youth population, despite representing only 5 to 10 percent of the overall youth population. The overall situation for these and other vulnerable groups is so grave, that the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, has appealed to governments to prevent this "horrifying global surge in domestic violence" amid lockdown measures.

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The goals of the Summit are to

a. Reawaken and magnify awareness of the gravity of domestic violence and its immediate and multigenerational traumatic legacies for individuals, families, communities, societies, the public at large, nations, and the international community. And the realization that domestic violence undermines many of the Sustainable Development Goals\textsuperscript{15} by impacting human solidarity at its elemental core — our homes, should underscore the urgency of reawakening our awareness.

b. Re-energize the commitment of all stakeholders, be they individuals, families, community institutions, including faith-based, educational, media and other cultural organizations, and governments on a local, national, regional and international level to renew our struggle, every single day, for a world free of domestic and all other forms of violence.

c. Review and evaluate existing policies and normative frameworks with particular attention to human rights and victims’ rights with a view to establish ongoing fora to support and ensure their improvement and effective implementation.

d. Dedicate and ensure sustainable delivery of optimal resources to help existing services and advocacy organizations to heal from COVID-19, and build the kind of integrated systems necessary to meet and redress this existential multigenerational public health and human rights challenge.

The Summit will provide a platform for

1. Victims/survivors to share their experiences and concerns;
2. Movements, associations, and individuals to inspire and suggest solutions;
3. Key experts to present and share comparative worldwide findings
4. Program leaders and caregivers to share best practices in responding to, treating, mitigating, and preventing domestic violence;
5. Educators, law enforcement and all formal and informal persons and institutions interfacing with victims/survivors and perpetrators of domestic/family violence to share their challenges in developing ongoing specialized training for responding to, redressing, and preventing its occurrence;

6. Leading governments and policy makers to share their most helpful policies and effective modalities of their implementation.

Tentative Program Outline

The 18-20 November, 2020 International Virtual Summit on Domestic/Family Violence During the COVID-19 Era, aims to give voice, support and solidarity, honestly discuss problems and promote viable solutions to everyone sheltering in what they call their home, wherever it is, particularly when faced with a common, this time invisible, existential enemy.

We envision the virtual Summit as a three-mornings-(9:00-13:00 EST) meeting, that would allow attendance of interested people from all over the world. The first two days will contain 2-3 panels each, focusing on the various vulnerable groups in the home/s. The third morning aims at a comparative/integrative roundtable discussion among and across these populations and among all the presenters. The last segment will report recommendations and adapt an Integrative Agenda for Action/ Social-familial-Domestic Contract/ Declaration/ Resolution that would reassert the reawakened awareness of the importance of the people and issues discussed and a commitment of all stakeholders to struggle for their integrative prevention and healing.

We chose 18-20 November in the midst of the 19 Days of Activism for Prevention of Violence and Abuse Against Children and Youth (1-19 November), and in anticipation of the 16 Days of Action to End Violence against Women (25 November- 10 December) between World Domestic Violence Day and Human Rights Day.

We are urgently open to your suggestions of interested governments and excellent, representative speakers, victim/survivor voices, and other participants, in addition to ourselves.

We aim to highlight and engage as many stakeholders as possible in the upcoming 18-20 November Summit and its anticipated outcomes.