Thematic Discussion: Sustaining and Expanding South-South-North Partnerships and Knowledge Co-Construction on Global Backlash to Reclaim Gender Justice

The following is a summary of the panel discussion held within the framework of the UN's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). This event took place at LAU New York on March 13, 2024, under the title "Sustaining and Expanding South-South-North Partnerships and Knowledge Co-Construction on Global Backlash to Reclaim Gender Justice." This event was organized with the support of Sweden.

Drawing on research from the Countering Backlash program, the discussion brought together researchers, civil society activists and development agencies. Panelists shared reflections on key insights from partnering in research on backlash, in activism and in international policy spheres. This was followed by a discussion with the audience. This event was co-chaired by Myriam Sfeir, Executive Director of the Arab Institute for Women (AiW), and Sohela Nazneen, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

Myriam Sfeir: Welcome to LAU New York. It is great to have you all with us today. Since its inception, AiW has been at the forefront of bridging academia and activism through research, policy, education, publications, and advocacy, bringing together scholars, researchers, policymakers, and students to take part in vital debates concerning gender equality and women's rights. This collaborative model generates research and work that has the power to break social taboos and encourage creative thinking. Hence, the importance is this panel today.

The AiW has partnerships with many organizations that basically see eye to eye with the philosophy of what we do and we are proud of this partnership with the Institute for Development Studies and in specific the Countering the Backlash project that we are partners on.

The year 2023 was a landmark year where AiW was hoping to celebrate it 50th anniversary and organize several events. The war stalled us and here is a list of our upcoming activities:

We will be organizing and hosting a TEDxLAUWomen event linked to the global annual TEDxWomen platform. The one-day event will consist of three sessions and will feature approximately 15 speakers from Lebanon and across the Arab region who will talk about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a gendered perspective, encouraging audiences to engage with innovative and inspiring ideas.

AiW is planning to update and relaunch the "Who Is She" online database on women leaders. Originally developed with support from the Danish organization KVINFO, the database was preserved by AiW after the project was paused. With support from UN Women and UNDP, funded by Canada as part of AiW's 50th anniversary, the platform will be revitalized and expanded. The database will function as a living, action-oriented advocacy tool that facilitates public access to the profiles and achievements of women leaders. AiW will host a launch event and share a guidance presentation to support students, researchers, and activists in using the platform.

We are currently preparing a special 50th anniversary issue of our journal, Al-Raida that will profile women and gender equality change makers across the Arab region in fields such as politics, feminist theory, environmental activism, and efforts to combat violence against women and girls. Women featured will be selected based on their achievements in feminist movement building, legal reform, scholarship, and barrier-breaking leadership. The issue will be published in print and online and will serve as an important archival record

AiW is planning to produce two theatrical plays, offering creative and artistic representations of women's leadership and achievements. . The first "Wadad: An Ant that Digs in Stone" centers on an activist, one of my role models, Wadad Halawani, a leading figure in Lebanon's struggle for justice for the families of the kidnapped and forcibly disappeared during the civil war. The play will retrace her life and activism, since the disappearance of her husband in 1982, where Halawani mobilized women and led advocacy efforts that resulted in the establishment of the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared and the passage of a law recognizing families' "right to know." The play will highlight women's leadership and the power of sustained activism.

The second play, "Leila, Latifah, Chimamanda", will feature readings from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, alongside writings by Arab feminist authors such as Latifah Zayyat (Egypt) and Leila Baalbaki (Lebanon). The play will create a dialogue between global, regional, and national feminist voices, emphasizing shared struggles against discrimination and inequality through courage, creativity, and intellectual resistance. Both plays are planned to tour private and public schools and universities across Lebanon.

AiW is planning to publish Our Feminine Memory, an e-book documenting the life stories and contributions of pioneering Lebanese women writers, educators, journalists, political activists, doctors, and professionals who actively supported the advancement of women's empowerment. This book was initiated by a previous director of the institute, Mona Khalaf, who passed away before finishing it. As part of honoring our own, we are publishing this book following her methodology: recording the life stories of these women through the testimonies of their loved ones since many of them have passed away.

So, we try as much as we can to populate the body of knowledge with data where AiW will continue contributing to regional and international initiatives, including its partnership with IDS on the "Countering the Backlash" project. The Institute will also continue expanding its knowledge production on women's political and economic participation, the

movement building and honoring our own, and plans to reengage with work related to women in Lebanese prisons.

Sohela Nazneen: Let me first introduce myself. I'm a senior research fellow at the Institute of Development Studies. For the countering backlash program, I lead the voice strand which works with women's rights and feminist organizations and LGBTQI organizations; and we are collaborating with research partners in five countries. What I will do is tell you a little bit about the program itself and the rationale behind this particular event. The program itself is a six-year program funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). We were very excited to get this grant partly because of the scope and flexibility, but also the timeliness of the issue. When we started the program, we already knew that backlash was unfolding. And now here we are in 2024 and the world has changed dramatically than what it looked like in 2019 in all spaces, whether that's at UNCSW or whether in our own countries. We have had to grapple not only with economic crisis triggered by the pandemic, but also politically with the rise of the conservative forces and the erosion of rights that we had thought were already won, gained and sealed. And that rollback is certainly scary in a sense, but even in scary moments, and Myriam touched on many somber moments that's taking place in the world today, there is always a reason to hope. Hope is basically about how we collaborate and how we create partnerships across different levels. And this event is about bridging that gap and creating that partnership using the program itself as a case to get into the discussion about people's experiences and allow the panelists to reflect on that partnership itself.

What Myriam touched upon too is about the work that AiW does. We have nine fantastic partners in six countries: Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Uganda, Lebanon, and Brazil. Most of our partners are research institutes or universities, but we also have partners that are networks and alliances. So, it's a diverse set, and the reason behind this diversity, is that Countering Backlash is not your usual research program. We do have research strongly embedded, partly because you need to understand the nature of the problem, before you start tackling it. Understanding backlash is one of the objectives in terms of who are the drivers, and how does it manifest. What does it look like in different contexts? What are the tactics, what are the strategies? But apart from that, we are also tracking specifically the co-optation of feminist ideals, feminist language, and feminist gains. And what does that co-optation look like at different levels, both in international and national spaces.

And the last bit is the most important part of this program. We have been fortunate in the sense that for the partners that we have had, the program acts as a convening space for bringing people together to have dialogues on this issue. Not just dialogue among the researchers, but also dialogue within country, with alliances and organizations that are working to fight against the erosion of rights. But it's also about (serves as) an important space in terms of learning from each other about what works (to counter backlash).

The focus of this talk is about the collaboration and partnership and how does it look like when you have a program that allows you to co-construct the agenda to really work with organizations that you want to research with but also strengthen capacity and learn from. What does that program look like and what kind of freedom does it entail? Where does it allow you to go? So, we are going to have different perspectives both from our partners in terms of what does it look like when you're based in the global South and yes, I'm using that term because I am from the global South, and I've worked and was based in the global South for a longtime. And in my head, I'm still a Southern person. So, it's partly that, but it's also about what does collaboration look like when you're trying to collaborate between their South-South collaborations, South-North collaborations and then as funders,

what does it look like when you try to facilitate that collaboration? So, challenges are different, experiences are different and the wins in these are also different, right? So, let's go deeper into that. Myriam, the floor is yours to ask the first set of questions.

Myriam Sfeir: We will begin the conversation by focusing on Lebanon. My colleague Nay has been leading on the research related to AiW and Countering the Backlash. As we might all know, the current situation in Lebanon is very restrictive, and the term backlash is being used interchangeably. To address this, we developed a paper in which we redefined backlash, specifically in the Lebanese context.

I would like to hear from Nay on this. At AiW we have done a lot of research, organized convenings and dialogues with women right defenders, and held a conference on backlash. We've also worked closely with the LGBTIQ community and networks. From your perspective, what kind of actions have emerged from all these convenings and this research?

I would also like you to reflect on your intention to write an article on backlash and the frustration we've shared about how the term backlash is overused to describe almost everything. In your view, what needs to be done to unpack the work we've done so far? And how has it impacted, or might impact the landscape in Lebanon? And where do you stand on these issues now?

Nay El Rahi: If I want to speak about the landscape of the civil society and of women's rights and feminist activism in the country, I would start by saying that this has been a very small circle of people, who recycle the issues that they work on and the causes that they work on. And we're always convening around the same usual suspects. So, the people that we take to the streets with or the people we see in political meetings are the same ones who we would ask to convene or would invite to our conferences and meetings. With this in mind and with the fact that the country has been in an accelerated downward spiral in terms of the financial, the economic meltdown, and now with the genocide in Gaza and the spillover of the war, the Israeli war in the south of the country, these people are burnt out. And this sense of exhaustion has been heightened by the mass exodus that happened after the Beirut blast in 2020. So, this left us with an even more limited and even smaller circle of people who are active and who are willing at this point to talk about these issues again and again.

In addition, when I first reached out to these people to convene and to put together a very contextualized definition of backlash, I had to explain what we mean by backlash. This was maybe two or three years ago. Fast forward, why did I have to explain? Because in our paper and in our context, the hostility against women and the exclusion that women and other vulnerable communities suffer from is embedded within their systems. There are no gains against which people are going to react. And there isn't a momentum where right-wing forces or the authorities would see as something significant that they would react against. So, the baseline position of women and vulnerable communities in my country Lebanon – and maybe in this country too, I don't know – is already very frail.

There are already very basic rights that are denied to these communities. The claims to power that we see is talked about in literature on backlash is a far-fetched goal. That's one. Two, this exclusion and this violence originates from the family structure, as opposed to other contexts where power systems or oppressive systems or processes move from the state into other areas of life, into other structures. It's the other way around in Lebanon. So, it's the way the family system is a significant political actor, the fact that

women's role in the family is also extrapolated into the registries and into the census and into the state, as well as the fact that what we call backlash today in literature and in the global north and in the US is not the fundamental threat to women's rights in Lebanon. It's something that's an add-on. Yes, we see from time to time like a certain movement against a woman politician who is not affiliated to any party or any family, for instance. And that's because she is a woman that's breaking into a male-dominated patriarchal system, basically, which is the parliament. But the fundamental threats to women's situations, women from queer groups in the country is basically embedded in the way the entire system is built up. So we had to put a definition of what backlash is in our context, because the backlash that people talk about in the literature emanating from the global north is not relevant to us or was not relevant at that point. You know though how the funding trends basically take over everybody's conversations and take over all the spaces and there's a lot of money coming in on, say, X issue. Everybody starts, it increasingly seeps into the conversations, and it becomes the issue.

So fast forward three years, and we're seeing people like feminists and scholars talking about violence against Syrian refugees in the country, which has been the case even before the Syrian war, even before the mass influx of Syrians into the country; this is part and parcel of the systemic situation of the country. It's not suddenly called backlash. It's a bit weird in that sense, and which is why we wanted to write this article inspired by – I don't know if any of you read Jadaliyya – an article in this journal in 2011 by Maya Mikdashi on how not to study gender in the Middle East, and she puts 10 ways of doing that. So, I was thinking of doing the same for backlash, because it really requires a lot of defining and because otherwise, we would risk diluting the actual issue, the actual predicament of women in this country. And one last point is on backlash as well, the fact that when we talk, the partners that we have, that usually fund so many activities for women's rights organizations, like the UN agencies and other funding agencies, are also the same actors that fund the state, state activities, the military institution in the country, in our country at least. And they know fully well that these institutions, the military institution and the state and these agencies basically are major perpetrators of backlash and of violence against the women, the very groups that they fund. So, I think there's a lot to be said around that, around how the conversation on how a funding stream can take over, a conversation can hijack a particular issue and basically contribute to turning it somewhere else.

Sohela Nazneen: Thanks, Nay, for those reflections. Obviously, there are quite a few things to pull out from there. One is of course, remember we started the conversation with partnerships. So, when we were framing the program, these were the issues that we needed to grapple with in terms of when you're stitching a multi-country program together, how do you find commonalities and how do you ensure context specificity in terms of what's unique in that context to understand the manifestations of backlash itself. The other thread that's relevant here, and Chloe, I will pick up that conversation with you in terms of the question that comes in terms of context specificity, but that's later. But what is relevant here is also the issue around how we looked at how programs are designed and how much flexibility is there. Myriam, I think you have a question for Jerker around that. And the donor funding bit and the contradictions in that, we will be picking that up with you later, Eda and Constanza. Myriam, go ahead, ask your question to Jerker.

Myriam Sfeir: So, I just wanted to say that it's thanks to a meeting that happened here between Jerker and our previous executive director, Dr. Lina Abi Rafeh. And this room

may be in specific where North spoke to South, and we got that funding and came on board the Countering the Backlash Project. And so basically, Jerker, my question to you is that IDS has a long history of convening, but this is not without its challenges. So, like, if you could tell me what are your reflections on the way the Counting the Backlash was envisioned to foster North-South partnerships that's equitable in constructing the agenda and the ways to foster knowledge sharing to counter backlash. And could you share maybe one or two examples based on the experience that you have, and we're all ears.

Jerker Edström: Thank you, Myriam. That's a big question to answer in one or two examples. But I am a Northerner, you know, somebody coming from the global north and working at IDS. I studied there in the 1980s, and this was an institution established in the 1960s to assist the British government in helping the former colonies to develop; this was the north-south development encounter par excellence. But of course, IDS has evolved quite radically over the decades since, and with it a lot of values and ways of working with participation, in a way that our current director calls 'engaged excellence'. I don't like the term itself, as I think we simply need to aim for excellent engagement. IDS also prides itself on its 'power of convening', as we sometimes say, but also in terms of our approach to co-construction and of knowledge sharing. As you already mentioned Myriam, I was here before, in 2019 five years ago, and it was in this room actually that I met Lina Abi Rafeh, who was hosting a parallel CSW event. I had just been an interloper at another OECD DAC Gender Net meeting down the road, trying to convince donors that backlash against gender issues was going to be a problem and it was already a problem then, even if not recognised then. Anyway, that was a harder conversation.

Thankfully, I met Lina here and we struck up a new contact, and this is relevant to co-construction because the way that we have been co-constructing our work and focus on gender has very much been based on long-term collaborations with organizations like NEIM in Brazil; for example, we have Cecilia Sardenberg here from NEIM, who was a member of an older IDS-hosted Pathways to Women's Empowerment Program for many, many years. AiW would be a brand-new partner, but I sensed that our values and outlooks on collaboration and the current moment were aligned. Our co-construction is evolving as the different strands of work start coming together, such as Sohela's research strand on feminist 'Voice' and my strand focused on masculinities and 'Patriarchy'; we work with AiW from all strands. We had already worked with partners for decades essentially, and in 2015-16 Sohela and I were traveling around, going to potential donors in Canada, Sweden, Norway, and Finland. We had also pulled partners together at a workshop in Brighton to define what are the new directions for research in reframing gender justice. Anyway, that led to this program and some of those older partners were very much active in its current framing, whilst AiW joined in at the crucial moment at the outset.

So, coming into the program itself, thankfully Sida agreed to fund us after our adapting to feedback from them, and we also engaged – along with other civil society groups – with feedback on Sida's own gender strategy, I should add. So, there is a two-way conversation there. In the first year COVID came along and we had to adapt. But regardless, we had a year of co-constructing, a year of program startup, which was essentially co-constructing the theoretical framings of backlash. A lot of these discussions, which explore what backlash is, still go back to those conversations that we had, both in

Brighton and then online, repeatedly over an entire year. As strand leads, for example Sohela pulls together a framing around Voice and I pull together a framing around Patriarchy. Then we work in different ways with different – and some overlapping – partners, at both local and global levels. And of course, this co-construction is challenging because it's long-term, iterative work. It requires staying the distance and trust and work, you know, not giving up on each other. And so, whilst most of our partnerships were long-terms collaboration, the one with AiW wasn't. So, we also had to take risks and stay... – not that AiW was particularly risky! – but we had to take some risks and stay flexible. That was also a good opportunity to reach out and expand the focus to engage more with the Arab region in a way that we weren't so good at before. Then more recently, through what we call a 'seed grant', we've picked up another new partner in Turkey, Özyeğin University in Istanbul. We've also expanded collaborations with other organizations, including in Serbia and Pakistan.

So, how do we co-construct and share knowledge? Knowledge sharing and co-construction overlap, of course. It's partly in conversations like today's or at conferences that we share our knowledge, where we're also getting new ideas for shaping future directions. But also say that, you know, that happens both locally and globally, like here, this is a global space. We had pulled together some international workshops in Kenya and Uganda, and I mentioned Brighton earlier. So that's a very important space and we tend to lead in that space because we are the global institution in the group, if you like, the northern institution. But it's not only global, of course.

Last year, AiW lead an event in Beirut, a big conference where people came from countries all over, particularly the Arab region, but also the US and other spaces like Serbia. And that was an amazing space, a regional space and led by partners. We were co-hosts, but you did all the work; you were leading it. And of course, at country level, there is so much that goes on in terms of knowledge sharing and events by all partners in all countries, including publishing separately, independently in journals and so on. So, it happens at all levels. We are also planning together for the Association for Women in Development (AWID) forum in December. We've spent months talking about and putting in joint proposals for AWID with partner. Most proposals were led by partners and we're all going to as many events as possible. We have limited resources – the main challenge – but we're going to try to convene in Thailand in December to share our knowledge and engage in conversations, again at the regional and global levels.

Myriam Sfeir: Thank you, Jerker. I agree the conference that took place in Beirut was very important simply because it spoke to local actors, and there were also regional partners. So, we had other donors pitch in to fund regional partners to attend and to continue the discussion. And in Lebanon now we're known as the backlash people, simply because we started off with this project with ideas. So basically, you brought in a lot of important points. And one thing I wanted to highlight is the flexibility. So, I think it was a work in progress whereby we co-constructed things together. And there are partners that are totally different from other partners. Belonging to very many geographical locations, AiW had to do something different. And we now, while co-convening and while finishing, within certain strands, we need to be flexible and not operate in terms of boxes simply because Brazil started off with a dictator and moved on to somebody. Like the context changed a lot within the context of Brazil, whereas for us, it's remained constant and even with more pushback and with the same conditions, if not even worse. The flexibility, which the program allows, means that we can sew in the deliverable based on what's doable and sometimes what's not doable. And I think IDS is the ultimate convener simply because of the fact that there's this flexibility. And I wish to highlight one important aspect of the voice

strand simply because we were able to document the women's movement and the situation of the women's movement from the war years until before the Beirut blast. And very soon we need to ask for funding from after the Beirut blast. That alone is a documentary in itself. We would want to highlight what has happened and the accelerating pushback on rights and on all groups that work on issues related to gender justice.

Sohela Nazneen: Chloe, let's come to you and let's pick up on something that Nay had raised, namely that there are concepts and some concepts travel. And some concepts don't necessarily exactly travel in the way where they originate from. So, you have to rethink in terms of what each concept means. And, you have to create new concepts and new ideas.

My colleague Tessa Lewin, from South Africa, is not here, but a lot of her focus, for example, was on looking at co-optation of feminist language and ideas – from South Africa's experience of the state being captured. So, if we think of state machinery and resources by dominant parties, if state capture is a concept, can that concept be applied to think through how we think about backlash? And then Tessa came up with this idea which is called "discourse capture," which is about capturing feminist or queer discourse in particular ways that alter the meaning completely. And there are different tactics and strategies that the oppositional coalition apply, and we know that backlash actors are diverse. So, discourse capture is one of those concepts that this program came up with. And there's a lovely paper on the subject in Gender and Development, volume 29, issues 2 and 3. If you want to look at it, it's open access. But it's also a concept that we ask our partners to test, so we can validate it through different types of examples and data. So, Chloe, even if not impersonating Tessa as such, you're definitely representing her paper. Having said that, would you give us some examples of what this "discourse capture" idea is and the different manifestations that we see because it is an important aspect in terms of understanding backlash itself and an example of how partnership worked in your program to be able to test this idea.

Chloe Skinner: As Sohela said, I really am presenting a paper that our colleague Tessa Lewin has written. This is a co-constructed presentation as well, based on a concept that has been co-constructed – through conversation, to think through a framing that could be applicable to different places to understand different forms of backlash. To begin briefly, as Faludi says, backlash can manifest either overtly as full-frontal assaults and also subtly through undercover myth making. And drivers can be material, for example, threatened power or also existential, such as threatened norms. And what that looks like in varying spaces, of course, looks different. Finding or locating those subtler forms of backlash, if we have kind of one frame that isn't fluid or flexible, is therefore hard. So, discourse capture is one way of trying to find a fluid frame, something cohesive that holds together, but that can be applied to different contexts.

Backlash, as we know, is the politics of preserving gender inequality and could also be conceived as the dismantling of systems that protect women's or queer rights. And that can include discursive systems. So, as we know, language has material consequences; arguments create political realities, whether people live or die, have access to power or not. There would be no shelters for women, for example, if the term domestic violence didn't exist. The language and frames that we use carry political meaning that has material consequences. As Sohela said, the notion of discourse capture came about from Tessa's reflections on the concept of "state capture." This is a term that was first identified in a World Bank paper in 2000, and it's described as a governance disorder in transition economies in which public interest is subverted by the development of problematic relationships between business and politics, and then popularized within the South African context

particularly in 2016. Taking state capture, Tessa kept seeing discourse capture everywhere so she started convening and conversing with partners and looking in different contexts to see how and where we could see discourse capture. So existing literature talks about co-optation, about re-signification, about the re-conceptualization of progressive notions, the appropriation, the erosion or the dismantling of gender justice, and that again, as I've said, operates within the realm of discourse. Tessa has thus divided this global frame discourse capture into four different types. Those four types are re-signification; shifting; mimicry and appropriation; and twisting and repurposing.

The most obvious and significant example of discourse capture we could see is the re-signifying of gender as an ideology. Through that framing, gender became seen as a threat, a monolithic, singular entity that could be feared. This notion that was a traveling repertoire of meanings, malleable according to context, was so dependent upon the history of a particular country to the extent that gender as a term became a signifier that could be used by different groups to discredit feminist and queer thinking and action – which in some cases led to the closure of gender studies departments, in Hungary for example. As Judith Butler writes, there is no ideology of gender, for it is a rich academic discipline, and it does not espouse a single view. Butler, in this respect, is often seen as the architect of gender ideology and therefore an effigy of her was burnt in 2017 when she arrived in Brazil to launch a book.

The second form of discourse capture is called shifting – the rhetorical shifting and the ways in which backlash actors can take terms and shift them and also change their own frames of reference and frames of action. So, this is very clear for example in pro-life forces who've transformed in many cases their framing of the abortion issue as one that pits the rights of the fetus against the rights of women to one that emphasizes the bond between the woman and the child. So again, we can discern a shift away from over shaming and its accompanying religious rhetoric, to one that instead comes across as more compassionate, as ostensibly more women-centered, and one therefore that could be put alongside the term feminism.

Mimicry and appropriation are the third type of discourse capture. And again, we see this in so many different contexts and situations, such as mimicking and appropriating feminist terms or queer terms. For example, in France, La Manif Pour Tous, the protest for everyone, which was a French anti-gender movement, was initially coined to oppose the same-sex marriage bill. And now it has reformulated and expanded its remit to the defense of the traditional family unit. Manif means protest and is strongly associated with the left in France. Whereas La Manif Pour Tous appropriated the language of le marriage pour tous, which was the same-sex marriage bill itself. So that's the protest for everyone, taking the language of marriage for everyone. In Uganda, the organization responsible for leading the Anti-Homosexuality Bill is named the Interfaith Rainbow Coalition Against Homosexuality, hence a very clear hijacking of the LGBTQI symbolism of the rainbow. Or in Argentina, there was the counter movement to the Green Tide Pro-Choice movement. The counter movement was called the Blue Wave. So, we saw a mimicking of visual symbols in that case, where the green scarf was mimicked by the blue scarf.

Finally, there's the twisting and repurposing of feminist or queer discourse. A very clear example in this case, and again, something that's moved in different contexts and is therefore very malleable, is this notion of gender ideology as ideological colonization. Again, we see how progressive language and action and praxis for anti-colonial movements, for decolonization, is put alongside regressive right-wing movements by claiming gender ideology as ideological colonization. There are also ways in which different rights get pitted.

Gay rights, for example, are seen as threatening religious rights. So, again, there's that repurposing. To amply understand what this can mean, we have to locate and document discourse capture, and to do so in partnership and in conversation.

So, a frame like discourse capture can work then as a point of departure, something that we can grapple with and talk about, and look for different examples of it across the globe. And what's really needed for that, and for all forms of counter backlash, is practical coalition-building, cross-movement activism, solidarity, and the shared crafting of a world, of a pro-gender worldview, whereby we can take frames like this and unpick them, document what's happening and find creative ways to resist it. To conclude, gender is a primary battleground across the world for neoconservative politics, featuring privileged groups seeking to restore, maintain or increase their power and position. As we know, this is happening very differently in different ways. And I have a lovely quote here, which is "we should simultaneously both seek to emulate our opponents' newly unified front and more profoundly to be what they fear we are."

Sohela Nazneen: Thanks, Chloe. There are many, things to unpack in terms of discourse capture. And we know it's happening in our all of our contacts, actually, in different ways. But what is important is if that's a point of departure, as you mentioned, Chloe, in terms of thinking through, OK, how do we work through this within partnership to not just gather evidence, but also to counter it. A big part of that is also thinking through, well, how do we resource what we do? But also, how do we create spaces? It's not just about money. The resources are many different types, and we need to be creative in many different ways. That creativity looks different when you're at the national level. That looks different when you're sitting at a research organization. And I am using that label when you are a development partner agency or a donor agency. People look at you for a particular kind of support and help. And the way you need to function and the politics there is also a tricky way to navigate and, given the current context, not always easy. So, Myriam, I am passing this bit to you to ask the first question to Constanza, and then I will ask Sida the next question.

Myriam Sfeir: We all know that UN Women has played a very strong role in shaping global discourses on women's rights and gender equality. So, in your experience, what fosters knowledge sharing among actors that you work with in the global north and south? And what role is UN Women playing in general? What can you do more? And what can we do more, bearing in mind, and I have to add a caveat over here, that you funded a very important course that was contextualized to Arabic. It's a course that the Global Women's Institute at George Washington University has, and we were given funding to basically translate it and contextualize it to the region with videos from the region and funding from UN Women Global and WHO. This is a course that benefits the region simply because it's on prevalence data. And how do you collect prevalence data when you're working on GBV? We started rolling it out, we did a pilot, we're rolling it out now to a coalition in Lebanon, and there are discussions with you and women on how to do we roll it out to the Arab region whereby people work on issues related to how to collect prevalence data on GBV in general in the Arab region. So, I hijacked the conversation a bit, but the floor is yours. Tell us more about successful initiatives.

Constanza Tabbush: I want to give you a bird's eye view of the different challenges UN Women as a UN agency, that champions gender equality and women's rights, is facing due to this growing opposition that is creating new obstacles and questions when it comes to the three core functions of our organization. One obviously has to do with challenges related to our normative work and our work in intergovernmental spaces, and I'll go deeper

into that in a minute. But another important discussion has to do with challenges related to our operational and programmatic policy work, country and regional level, where our offices work alongside governments in the implementation and design of policies. And yet, the context in many of those countries in some extreme cases has to do with governments that actively promote an anti-gender agenda. So that puts our offices in a very complicated position. But that is an outlier example, and different colleagues across the globe face new challenges in how they do their work and how to navigate those. And we had a really interesting internal webinar, where we gather staff from different regions where we could discuss and build how the organizational thinking on how to address that. I think the other important challenge has to do with our coordination role, to convene and coordinate different UN agencies, also coordinate actions. We enact different roles with academic institutions, civil society, and other key progressive partners in government institutions because governments are also not monolithic, in fact are very heterogeneous. At the basis of this, is the challenge of building a kind of advocacy strategy where we can use the convening power of our organization to convene different stakeholders, create those connections, create those dialogues. We know well enough what backlash looks like in different countries, and there's more and more research on that, but we know much less about what works and what women are doing to counter it and what should we amplify, you know, and in which context and what are the risks and opportunities. So, I think that UN Women can also play an important role in bringing those different experiences together and amplify what works in different countries.

I wanted to zoom in on the idea of how we can reclaim and reframe, and create counter narratives that are global in scope around some of the key contested concepts that anti-gender movements and campaigns have focused on. And I want to do so with the example of one of our latest flagship reports that is "Progress of the World's Women" that focus on families in a changing world. As we all know, a lot of the anti-gender campaigns that have spread across regions focus on the issue of families, such as the "Don't Mess With My Children" campaign in Latin America which is a social media born in Lima, Peru on 26 December 2016, and on comprehensive sexuality education, such as the anti-LGBTIQ rights bills in Africa. And we know that those discourses are creating stark divisions in intergovernmental spaces. There is what some authors call a bit of a framing war going on in those spaces between the idea of the family or diverse families, even about certain key terms like sexual and reproductive health and rights, LGBT sexual orientation, gender identity, and comprehensive sexuality education, etcetera. Against this backdrop, how can we create a progressive feminist discourse around the family that is compelling? We also need to reclaim the space of reproduction and the domestic sphere that have been so central to feminist economic and political thinking, so we shouldn't be forbidden to speak about these.

One of our country representatives gave feedback midway through the writing of the report saying that we are losing the communication war, because new conservative actors have highly emotionally laden narratives that address family lives and struggles and people can relate to that. We, however, are retreating into a very technocratic kind of language that speaks about women's rights, which is central, but then people cannot really relate that much to it. So how can we create that counter narrative about families of today, and put forward a progressive agenda to support women and people who live in all family forms? And how can we bridge some of those geopolitical divides that are creating gridlock in many of these global spaces? Those were the key aims of this report that was called "Families in a Changing World." And I think what we tried to do, we tried to achieve it, not only by creating this reclaiming and reframing of families as a set of relations that can enable the enjoyment of women's rights, but we tried to do so by using

robust data and putting together global figures on what actually families look like. These census data made quite evident that less than a third of families actually resemble something similar to what we call a nuclear traditional family with a heterosexual couple and kids.[1] So, we try to bridge the ideological divide by making an argument that is data-driven rather than ideologically laden; so basically, by presenting the facts. So, this is a fact. How do we deal with this – all the issues and constraints that women face in different family forms?

The second challenge had to do with presenting this comprehensive package of family-friendly policies that span different themes from land rights to social protection and care, from SRHR to violence within families, etc. And which entry points do we think could potentially gather more support from different countries that are perhaps not in the extreme of the ideological spectrum, but a little bit in the middle? So, we thought that choosing the theme of social protection is something that a lot of countries can rally around and we can work with that moveable middle that might not agree on other issues, but that could see social protection as an entry point to then discuss what kind of conditions do we need to ensure women enjoy their rights irrespective of the type of family they inhabit. After the launch of the report, we saw different receptions in different contexts. For instance, in some countries where there was some room for maneuver, we saw that some of our country offices actually took up the idea. I mean, one of the country representatives that I told you was losing the communication war, then produced a companion national report on families to create a different take and an advocacy campaign. The same happened in Argentina and in the Arab states that also produced a companion report for that Global Progress report. But then again, we had other colleagues that were concerned because it was too sensitive in their context. So, in some spaces, it created opportunities, in others not; we do know that some member states used the data of the report to make the case of the diversity of families in some of the intergovernmental spaces. But in any case, I think that documenting the report's impact is important as it raises the question about what we need to do more. Thank you.

Myriam Sfeir: Thank you so much, Constanza. Sohela, it's thanks to Sida that this project saw light; it was a five-year project, Covid changed everything and now it's a six-year project. We're into year 5, and we are so happy with this partnership and I will leave the floor to you to discuss it further.

Sohela Nazneen: Those are very important points partly because they are about holding the space, so when your colleague talks about losing the communication war because of international norms, exchanging ideas about backlash becomes important even if sometimes they feel far-removed from our context. Such conversations or encounters allow you to open these spaces, and data and evidence become really important in terms of what type of research to do. In some counties the report was able to create that wedge; in other countries, it's not possible and maybe we need to think about other strategies or maybe our strategies are not as effective. One thing out there also that you touched on is the emotional bit; we are very good on technical because we don't want to be political, but we are seen as political because our job actually is. When you work on gender there is no way to not claim that you are political, and in a lot of times because of the history upfolded, we were backtracked.

We use technical knowledge when it comes to SRHR, so people think it's not controversial, but we were at a point where we needed to hit people in their hearts and we don't have these effective strategies as developed as of yet. We know it matters to us, we are passionate about it, but how to get to people for whom it is not as deep of an issue is

the war we have been fighting. Sida is part of that larger war, given that Sida – remember that risk and trust fit ideas – has worked for a long time with some other innovative programs funded by Sida apart from countering backlash. So, if I think historically, there has always been a relationship in terms of taking the risk because when this program was funded, not necessarily everyone was talking about backlash, and we were given that flexibility and that space to develop the program in a particular way and you trusted us to be able to deliver. Having said that, my question to you Sida is to share with us examples of how you see working in collaboration and partnerships in terms of resisting backlash. We are not the only program, there are other experiences that Sida has, so some of the examples of hope would be useful, since we have talked about difficulties quite a lot.

Sida: Most of you know that Sweden has been showing commitment to gender equality and we see it as both a means and an end, a means to achieve other goals and other ends, and within our development cooperation, we focus on women's and girls' rights, freedoms, empowerment and opportunities; this is done with two subgoals: we focus on women's and girls' ability to freely decide their lives and bodies and on strengthening girls' economic empowerment. As you know in this room, the right of women and girls to freely decide their lives and bodies is questioned in different ways by the growing anti-gender movement, and being aware of this, we know the importance of enabling, which is what we can do as a donor: enabling the knowledge sharing and convening of different actors to focus on the anti-rights movement and find strategic ways to counteract and to stand up for human rights for all. We are also seeing that supporting equality is not just supporting the actors that are working specifically for gender equality but also supporting gender equality integration through all our work, and focusing on strengthening equality and family law, women's decision-making and ending gender-based violence. It all goes hand in hand, and we need to contribute to setting that narrative. What we also need to do and what we are trying to do and supporting, really, is to have an intersectional understanding and have a locally led and inclusive approach. And I think this also goes back to your comment about donors focusing on one thing in one country.

The importance of locally-led organization and organizing cannot be stressed enough. The backlash consists of actors that work together globally, regionally, and locally. And therefore, we also need to support actors working globally, regionally, and locally. As I said, yes, we need to support all partners to safeguard gender equality and women's rights. And through our long-dedicated support to gender equality in which a redistribution of power and resources is key, in relation to women's and girls' rights and LGBTQI person's rights, and SRHR, we support also system strengthening and long-term sustainable support to uphold these rights and values. And we have dedicated contributions towards partners such as IDS and we're very happy about this cooperation.

Sohela Nazneen: Thank you, Sida, for that. Sometimes we forget what it looks like from the angle of funders sitting there and the need for evidence to prove your case that this work needs to continue. And that collaboration is always useful between researchers and funding agencies, but it's also the collaboration. And our work wouldn't have been possible without the work that happens on the ground in terms of activists who are fighting every day, but also the kind of work that they do. Myriam, you mentioned documentation of what has happened and its importance, because for a lot of us, we get busy doing, we forget that, okay, that also needs to be documented in terms of what has worked, what didn't work, what happened. And that systematic documentation becomes quite important.
Myriam Sfeir: I just wanted to add something on the importance of localizing the agen-

da. This is a very important thematic that we need to all look into, including the importance of local voices and giving voices to local people. So, thank you for mentioning that.

Sohela Nazneen: I am going to move to a person where actually things have shifted. Brazil has managed to have a turnaround. But that turnaround is not without challenges. Because once you start eroding institutions and systems, it does take a hold. So, Cecilia, if you could tell us a little bit about what's happening in Brazil and sort of the partnerships that you think are important, including the work that you have been doing in countering backlash with the different feminist groups in Brazil because the presidential elections there were quite important, but you guys also did interesting work in terms of tracking the abortion discourse and also around women's political participation.

Cecilia Sardenberg: If you remember, when we had our first meeting in England in Brighton, Maira and I cried when we spoke about Brazil. I cried because we had seen a lot of good changes with PT and then, suddenly, after the election of Bolsonaro and the extreme right taking over, backlash on everything, not only on women's rights, but on all kinds of rights. The extreme right took over and they're very strong, not only in Brazil, but they're going all over. So, we thought that there's no way we can talk about backlash without talking about the rise of the extreme right because it comes with a religious conservative faction, which is very strong, neo-Pentecostalism growing tremendously in Brazil, which used to be a Catholic country. Indeed, there's been a change and it's not a good one. We started our research not only with Bolsonaro as president, but also right when the pandemic hit. And then during the first year Bolsonaro was in government, he canceled all the social support programs, like Bolsa Família, namely the conditional cash transfers, and then came the pandemic. The poor became poorer and died: more than 700,000 people died, victims of Covid.

I'm sorry, I got emotional... Bolsonaro could have supported all the vaccination campaigns, but he didn't. To the contrary, he was behind the spread of negationism all over the country and it was difficult to fight against it. So, our first study was on the attempts to reactivate the Bolsa Família program. And the authorities didn't want to give anything, not even $50 per family. It met with it was a long and strong reaction, people pressuring for a better program of social support, which finally was passed in Congress. It wasn't a Bolsonaro concession, it came from pressure in and from Congress. Women had an important role in that direction, in community organizations, and helping community-held kitchens, social kitchens, helping people in poor neighborhoods. And it was a quite strong movement in those communities, led by women.

Then, we started seeing the backlash against legal abortions in Brazil, with a 10-year-old girl denied her right to have an abortion. In Brazil, the abortion laws are very restrictive. You're only allowed to have an abortion if you're in danger of dying because of that pregnancy, or if the pregnancy came as a result of rape, or in the case there are documented medical records showing that the fetus cannot have a right life outside of the uterus, a clause recently approved by the Supreme Court. But not even those cases were being enacted during Bolsonaro's term. To this day, our judiciary is still very, very conservative. Feminists have been trying to bring a change in that, to no avail. Even with Lula's election to the presidency, which was a big victory in terms of its importance, but it came with a rather small margin of votes. It's been difficult, but despite the fact that Lula was only elected through a center-left coalition, we've seen important changes. I cry because, you know, it's very emotional, but there's been a big change with Lula and we're going to continue to change things. I'm old so I cry easily: I've

been in this struggle for over 40 years, (well actually longer than that, I started back in my twenties...).

Sohela Nazneen: Thank you so much, Cecilia, for pointing out that there's always room for hope and we will not stop the fight and that it's a long struggle but we will get there. Myriam, we have 20 minutes left. What would you like to do? Do you want to open up the floor?

Myriam Sfeir: I think we should open it up to our audience to see if they have any questions and I just wanted to salute you for all the work that you're doing. Cecilia, you're paving the way and you've always been emotional about that simply because this is what you do. This is what you breathe; this is your bread and butter.

Cecilia Sardenberg: Yes, and we need to save the children in all the countries that are going to be suffering this backlash now; we're watching this happening in Gaza.

Sabika Shah Povia: Hello everyone, I am Sabika. My question is about South Asia. I come from India and have been working as an organizer and activist for a very long time, both in the space of gender as well as Muslim rights. I wanted to know from your particular context and throughout your studies, reports and research, about international efforts, multilateral, even bilateral, like any form of collaborative efforts, especially under fascist governments like the Indian government. For example, so many of my friends, comrades, and colleagues are behind bars at the moment. There's not a time when I go to the court that I'm not stopped by the police. What are some of the examples of safety and security mechanisms that we've actually seen or you have actually seen or put in place for countering backlash?

Chloe Skinner: I was just going to say one thing. Solidarity is one of the best mechanisms of facilitating safety for those for whom there is a greater risk in activism, counter backlash and so on and so forth and that to me is solidarity

Constanza Tabbush: I think we should not forget that the dismantling and erosion of democracy is a huge enabler and part of backlash and they go together, and that's in a way what you are talking about: the closure of civic space and the persecution of activists. Sometimes feminists, and I say that autocratically, focus on issue-specific topics, but we shouldn't lose sight of the broader institutional factors that enable not only backlash to flourish but also to consolidate. international instruments and mechanisms are quite useful, such as human rights ones, including universal periodic reviews to ensure human rights violations are recorded, monitored and provides evidence for accountability. For instance, in Brazil, leveraging human rights mechanisms was a strategy a lot of feminists used during recent times of democratic erosion.

I think some of the platforms for instance that are meant to bring feminists together to counter backlash raise another set of challenges about keeping activists safe at times of civil space closure. Are they an open space? Are they open access? And can anti-gender actors partake and completely debunk the space? How do you deal with that? When are you visible and when are you not? And just one last related thing, very much on the Latin America agenda, is that I do think that there is a huge need for comparative research on feminist responses to backlash. But equally important is to understand the institutional conditions that allow for the consolidation of economic and political power of neoconservative actors. And that means going beyond gender issues. That means looking at tax reforms that may create exemptions for informal religious institutions, as is the case in Brazil and in Central America. That also means looking at sudden shifts in state funding

for social provisioning, which for instance, may suddenly move away from subsidizing women's organizations to provide shelters. Thinking of those core broader issues, it's equally important to protect those safety mechanisms.

Nay El Rahi: Thanks, Cecilia, for bringing up a ceasefire, the feminist silence on this has been deafening. To say the least. I wanted to say something in a comment on the capture and a comment on the communication war. And also, in response to your question, and before the genocide unfolded, there was an escalation in anti-queer sentiment in Lebanon. But that's also to return to our conceptualization of backlash in our framing. One of the most important defining features of this in Lebanon is that it's used as a tool of misplaced action. The system in Lebanon has been undergoing an overlapping crisis. And instead of addressing the socioeconomic challenges that are actually threatening the country, they've been trying to extend the longevity of the system by creating imaginary enemies, such as the queer community, such as people who would want to get civil marriages outside of the country, to basically create this moral panic around this imaginary enemy. And this has been happening for over a decade now.

So, we have a vibrant queer community, yes, but at the same time and in parallel to that, the deployment of sexuality policing has been ongoing for a very long time at very critical political junctures in the country. As of June 2022, a year and a half ago, we started seeing a very radical ultra-Christian, ultra-right-wing movement saying that the queers and the civil marriage project are threats to Christianity; they're threats to the Christian conviction, etc. And in the past six months and last summer, political leaders started talking in an escalatory manner about it. Like, we need to kill these people – we need to, and everything that has to do with liberties and freedoms around the fact that they're able to coalesce all these terms under one ideology. So, anybody who says, oh, we're for freedoms, for personal liberties, is now painted as being queer, which is not an accusation in any way, but it's the way they've been framed.

In the summer of last year, there was a protest happening, just being pro-freedom. And it was severely attacked, and people had to flee and had to drive several kilometers away from the protest side, away from these thugs who were out saying we are against queers, at a time the protest was not about that. What we decided implicitly to do at this point is to step up our game in terms of discourse, so we used to be very capable of taking to the streets in terms of Lebanon, I would say, simply because the oligarchy doesn't care and would not look at us twice.

But now that it's become a bit more targeted and a bit more dangerous, I think the implication, the assumption is that we will stick to our online spheres, stick to something that would do very well, to produce knowledge about these things, basically reframe and reclaim the concepts while maybe staying away from the street because we cannot, as feminist groups and as secular feminist groups, I would say, we cannot protect the people that we're claiming to speak for or that we're claiming to defend. We don't have the capacity to basically be, to march around in protest sites to protect queer people or anybody who, the thugs would think, oh yeah, this person looks different, this person looks gay, I'm gonna go and beat them up. While we can't do this protection function, we would stick to the online sphere where we can produce knowledge and make sure that the discourse is getting to the places that it should get to.

Myriam Sfeir: I wanted to add a point about protection and the importance of listening to the community. At the university, we had a lecture on conversion therapy. The event was intentionally not publicized online; it was held in a closed university setting. One of

the speakers, a physician, expressed frustration about this because his positionality affords him a level of protection - he has the tools and status to feel safe and less vulnerable to harassment. In contrast, community members who were also speaking explicitly asked that the event not be widely publicized. They requested that the invitation be shared only with a very small group to preserve a safe space. We were asked not to post it online or share the link publicly.

What this highlights is the need to localize the agenda and, most importantly, to listen to community members. We need to respect what they want and need in terms of safety—whether within the LGBTI community or any group that is being targeted. This is one key piece of advice I think we can offer.

Nay El Rahi: One last thing, sorry – instead of publishing researchers' papers or reports in their own names, we're having incredible think tank organizations cosign or work together on very well-researched, very thorough documents on these issues, hence an implicit form of protection of the individuals per se.

Jerker Edström: The global coalition is not the goal. In fact, it's not called a global coalition; rather, it's called the Coalition for Gender Justice, and we held a first meeting in a closed, confidential and safe space. Let's just say it's a grouping of people from about 19 organizations or so across academia, civil society networks, policymakers and development partners - including multilateral and bilateral partners. We're also reaching out to philanthropists at the moment. I just wanted to mention this because the initial preliminary name for our group was the international defence or resistance committee. Right? And I thank you for mentioning the word 'fascist' as this aligns with the reality in a lot of people's lives. We are dealing with fascism in many cases and that's why I don't want to use that term lightly. I use it in very specific historical comparative analysis terms – from what went on in the 1920s and 30s in Europe – and more broadly, but particularly there anyway. So, it may be dangerous to name it. It's risky. But I don't think there's a blueprint for doing backlash resistance work safely without any risk. I mentioned at the beginning, we must take some risks, calculated risks. Local partners are often incredibly brave, and the idea of safe spaces is crucial. The idea of the Coalition for Gender Justice is that we bring together people from different spheres or spaces – from policy to research and to networks of CSOs – in order to create a safe space to strategize and think about what is needed for us to build, if you like, 'ecosystems' of resistance and mutual support. These spaces are informal and not extremely organized, and we'll meet a few times over a couple of years. Hopefully that will contribute to backlash resistance, because these actors are involved in other broader networks across academia, policy making, and others. The idea is to connect different networks as a kind of ecosystem of resistance, but there's no manual of how to do this safely.

Sida: Sida wants to highlight the importance of being context-specific when it comes to risk mitigating measures. Also, Sida encourages partners to include budget lines in their proposals to us as donors for psychosocial wellbeing and risk mitigating measures. Quite a few of the smaller NGOs and local organizations don't really know about the risks of the digital sphere. There is a need to increase awareness of the risks that are online; we're always online these days and being monitored in different ways by diverse actors. But we're also funding global actors, to really just decrease risks in various settings and to support movement building and feminist movement building, by convening spaces where people can meet and exercise solidarity. We also know that when funds are so scarce, organizations focus on their core activities rather than meeting others in solidarity for sharing knowledge or best practices, and for support.

Myriam Sfeir: Nurgul, an online participant, is asking a question: "I'm following the gender backlash conversation being held by many agencies and academic institutions and observing a very depressing moment as fascist nationalists and criminally patriarchal groups come to power around the globe erasing decades of achievements by women and human rights movements in just a few months. It's frustrating to see that international financial institutions continue collaborating with the government and in some cases even provide direct budget support which helps them sustain and gain people's support. The call for conditionality and international aid was made 30 years ago and is even more relevant now, as we're all observing a shortfall in funding for gender equality. Do you think communication between you and agencies, such as human rights organizations, and donors like the World Bank, IMF, ADB, and ERD should be more assertive? What needs to be done differently?"

Sohela Nazneen: Any reflections? It's a huge question, and I don't think you can have specific answers to that.

Constanza Tabbush: No, I don't have specific answers at the top of my head. Certainly, working with international financial institutions and trying to shape and modify some of the practices – in terms of conditionality, debts, and condonation, et cetera – is hugely important and that's something that we've highlighted. We raise the issues and hope others will do the same.

Myriam Sfeir: Jerker, you wanted to say something?

Jerker Edström: Our conversation about challenges to backlash resistance reminds me of the AIDS response and Alex Duval's analysis of funding for AIDS in Africa – in his book 'AIDS and Power' - and how the epidemic never brought down any governments, despite all the deaths and slow responses. Instead, he argued, floods of donor money to Uganda, in that case, had strengthened the authoritarian hand of President Museveni. More recently, we've had articles in The Guardian about how funding from Europe and America, bilateral funding, official funding, has been supporting groups who have backed and enabled the anti-homosexuality politics, which is part of this discussion at the moment, and that's been going on for a long time.

Around the millennium in the US, we had a change in terms of AIDS funding. The separation of church and state was fudged, and President Bush decided to make sure that faith-based organizations could get US government HIV AIDS funding for abstinence and faithfulness work. It's a longer story, but, of course, that funding has now continued to grow, and in 2009, I did a study with a colleague in IDS – Dr Hayley McGregor – in three countries in Sub-Saharan Africa called 'Aid for AIDS'; 40% of the health services in those countries were managed by members of Christian Health Associations and they were all getting aid funding. I'm not saying all of those organizations are backlash actors, but certainly there would be some among them. With the rise of local aspiring theocrats, and with the re-engagement between faith and state – this issue has flipped around full circle since the 20th century when countries tried to secularize governance in both international and national spaces so this remains a huge question.

Chloe Skinner: I think what backlash speaks to is the normalization of violence that's systemically imbricated within all of our systems and in which we're all enmeshed. We therefore need to take risks with a critical race analysis, alongside a class and gender analysis, to understand that risk is differently proportioned. For those of us who can, we need in some instances to take risks in solidarity and I think that is the only way in which

we're going to dismantle the systemic violence. Palestine is an incredibly clear image of that right now where there are millions of people under a genocide and some of us need to take risks to our jobs and to our funding to speak out and to be in solidarity, and I think that Nurgul's question speaks to that.

Myriam Sfeir: Yeah, we're going to do that, in terms of the risk taking. I just want to say thank you to all of you, and I just want to thank my colleagues and everyone who was responsible for making it happen.

Sohela Nazneen: Well, thank you to LAU for hosting us – it's such a marvelous space – but also for giving us the brain space to design this event, and thank you to all of you for coming.

ENDNOTES

1. For more information, please refer to: UN Women (2019). *Progress of the world's women 2019-2020: Familiees in a changing world.* https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/06/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2019-2020