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To:

Ms. Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission

Mr. Charles Michel
President of the European Council

Ms. Helena Dalli
Commissioner for Equality

Brussels, 25 March 2020

Dear President Von der Leyen,
Dear President Michel,
Dear Commissioner Dalli,

The necessary restrictions taken by EU Member States to contain the spread of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) are having deep, immediate and alarming effects on gender equality, in particular as regards domestic violence against women and children confined with violent partners. Preexisting violence can escalate, from psychological violence to physical and sexual violence. We are facing the concrete risk of increases in femicides and infanticides. For those victims in need of assistance, access to social and institutional support is very restricted, while public services such as the police are reaching saturation points. In addition, self-isolation measures entail risks of interruption of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (contraception, termination of pregnancy) further putting women's bodily autonomy under strain.

To face this situation, some Member States severely affected by the pandemic have put in place extremely necessary measures to provide support to women and children in danger and ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. These measures include the following:

- Emergency telephone numbers, active day and night, to provide victims with police assistance and support for accommodation relocation. The call is anonymous and free of charge and the number is deleted from the phone history after the call. Emergency texting or calls with geolocation by the police has been made available.

- Emergency telephone numbers dedicated to the prevention and protection of children in danger.
- Emergency chats, online platforms, phone applications active 24/7, for victims to ask for police, legal, psychological and medical support. Resources for psychological support have to be strengthened due to high risk of increase in suicides. Emergency protocols, such as being able to alert pharmacy or supermarket staff with code names or code sentences, who can call the police.
- Additional funding to provide accommodation centers with more places so that social distancing can be respected, and more personal protective and hygiene equipment against Covid-19 (masks, gloves, disinfectants). Hotels and other facilities have been made available to accommodate women in danger.
- Ad hoc structures to welcome women infected by Covid-19 or with possible Covid-19 symptoms for quarantine before entering the shelter or to host women from contagious shelters.
- Free telephone numbers to obtain assistance and guidance from dedicated medical structures for emergency healthcare services such as voluntary pregnancy termination and for the continuation of contraception methods.

In light of the above proactive measures, we call on the Commission and the Council to urgently share best practices between Member States in order to help countries adopt preventive and responsive measures to protect women and children in danger. The EU needs to tackle the heightened risk of exposure to domestic violence by raising public awareness at the highest level, by sharing information between Member States and by providing them with adequate financial support to implement exceptional measures.

Sharing data, knowledge and on-the-ground information is essential to foresee the impact of crisis and to tackle its effects. The European Commission, Council and Parliament must carry out Gender Impact Assessments on the effects of the pandemic on women and their rights in order to improve the effectiveness of the interventions, protect women's rights and promote gender equality.

Since the beginning of the current mandate, the Renew Europe group has promoted the harmonisation of women's rights in the EU and the sharing of best practices between Member States, launching the so-called "Simone Veil Pact". In line with this request and in order to improve discussions and dialogues between Member States on gender equality, we stress once again the need to have a dedicated Council configuration on Gender Equality gathering Ministers and Secretaries of States in charge of this matter. Now more than ever the need for such a configuration is apparent.

We ask you to address this urgent matter in the shortest possible time. Women in danger need protection and cannot wait any longer.

Yours sincerely,

Irène Tolleret, Renew Europe FEMM Coordinator

on behalf of the Renew Europe FEMM MEPs:

Sylvie Brunet, Radka Maxová, Karen Melchior, Samira Rafaela, Maria Soraya Rodriguez Ramos, Susana Solís Pérez, Hilde Vautmans & Chrysoula Zacharopoulou.