



Human Rights Council – 53rd Session ID with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women

Make Mothers Matter welcomes the report on *Custody, violence against women and children* - a sensitive issue which had not yet received the attention it deserves.

We fully support the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on 'parental alienation', a complex topic which mostly connects to domestic violence and abuse.

In particular, we stand by the fact that judges in family courts must make the best interest of the child their main concern, prevailing over all other considerations, especially in cases of evidenced or even suspected violence or sexual abuse. Where possible, children must be listened to.

We are also concerned by the widespread gender bias against mothers. As shown in the report, compared to fathers, they are twice as likely to lose custody of their child when they are accused of parental alienation.

But above all, we want to stress the importance of prevention, as domestic violence and abuse against women and children is also often the cause of separations and ensuing fights over child custody, with everyone losing. Educating on harmful gender norms, promoting a more equal sharing of care work, and involving fathers in their children's care and education from the outset, has proved to lead to better relationships within couples and can be linked to a reduction in domestic violence¹.

We therefore call on governments to action against the use of parental alienation to negate allegations of domestic and sexual abuse within family courts, but also to reinforce prevention.

¹ See for example Equimundo's 2019 State of the World's Fathers report: Unlocking the power of men's care – accessible on <https://stateoftheworldsfathers.org/report/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-helping-men-step-up-to-care/>