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## UNFPA's Experience in Addressing Violence against Women

It is a great pleasure to join you all today at this Colloquium, where so many rich experiences are being shared. To discuss violence against women in the Arab countries is not to imply that it does not exist throughout the rest of the world. It is not confined to a specific culture, region or country, or to particular groups of women within a society. Violence against women is a global crisis, the fight against which has been part of the global programme for human rights. Such violence represents an obstacle to equality, peace and development and a violation of human rights and freedoms. It has been said time and again that the Millennium Development Goals will not be met unless greater attention and resources are devoted to women's empowerment, gender equality, and ending violence against women and girls. The roots of violence against women lie in historically unequal power relations between men and women, and persistent discrimination against women. Its extent was recognized at the World Conference on Human Rights through the adoption of the global Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in December 1993.

According to the World Health Organization, at least one in every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime. It is estimated that, worldwide, 1 in 5 women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape throughout the course of her life. Violence against women has wide-ranging consequences for women, their communities, and their families – in particular their children.

Perhaps one of the most important steps to opposing violence in the Arab world – like in many parts of the world - is to fight against its concealment and to remove the cloak of silence surrounding it. A culture of silence on the subject will incur a heavy cost for individuals, society, and even the state. It is equally important to foster the idea that violence is an unacceptable behavior, contrary to what even some women are survivors themselves, have come accept as natural. In the Arab context, such forms of violence can range from honour killings, domestic violence, sexual violence and female circumcision. Migrant women and women from marginalized groups such as those who are nomadic or living in remote rural areas are at higher risk of being subjected to violence. As is the case in other parts of the world, women in the Arab world are often times not economically independent which increases their reliance on men, making them more exposed to sexual subjugation and physical violence. Sometimes even the shifting of these gender roles as more women enter the work force and participate more extensively in public life – can be contributing factors to violence – as is reportedly taking place in this country of Qatar. The forms and degrees of violence inflicted on women confirm that legislators, Governments and social movements globally – including in the Arab region - need to redouble their efforts to achieve security and development in a more comprehensive sense.

UNFPA is a strong advocate for eradicating violence against women and girls, recognizing it as a human rights violation and a public health threat. In various countries of Latin America and the Caribbean region, UNFPA has played a leadership role in the development of National Plans to Stop Violence against Women including in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Panama and Paraguay. The Fund is also committed to supporting coalitions against violence against women and girls, through the strengthening of capacities of civil society for establishing accountability of public policies and budgets and supporting national partners in ensuring that laws are in place, or improving them through legal reforms and strengthened enforcement mechanisms. This multifaceted response should take into account the continuum of violence across public and private spaces.



For example in Syria, the Fund held orientation workshops on gender-based violence for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, local government officials, religious leaders, media personnel, and local NGOs. UNFPA also supported the Joint Framework on gender-based violence which included research, building national capacity to deliver psychosocial support to those in need, including for Iraqi refugees.

In all cases, leadership and political will are one of the most important ingredients for ending violence against women. The United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's Campaign UNITE to End Violence Against Women is an illustration of the type of strong and sustained leadership that can make a difference in garnering political will at the highest levels of Government. The Secretary General is committed to the issue of ending violence against women. He states "violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned." United Nations agencies – each with its own vantage point based on their mandates and comparative advantages – are working to drive efforts on the Secretary General's Campaign – which has an overall objective to increase public awareness, political will and resources for preventing and responding to violence against women and girls. The United Nations is taking leadership on issue as evidenced by the multi-agency Task Force on Violence against Women's efforts to support Country Teams in Yemen, Jordan, the Philippines, Rwanda, Kyrgyzstan, Fiji, Chile, Jamaica, Paraguay and Burkina Faso in their efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women.

Strengthening the health sector's role to respond to violence against women, should also be an integral part of sexual and reproductive health and HIV and AIDS services. Capacity building support for health care sector is much needed so that when a woman visits a reproductive health centre – which may be her only chance to receive support, care and information about her situation of abuse – health care workers are able to respond appropriately. Many countries are noting the health sector as a critical entry point. In Saudi Arabia for example, doctors have reportedly been trained to respond to victims of domestic violence, while the Kingdom's hospitals and clinics are increasingly compiling data on the issue.

Although an increasing number of Governments have either adopted, are in the process of adopting or upgrading, national laws and policies that address violence against women and girls, challenges to their enforcement and implementation are resulting in impunity. Comprehensive and non-discriminatory legislation covering all forms of violence against women, and its effective implementation and monitoring, are a prerequisite for eliminating impunity. Access to justice for victims, including through awareness of rights and availability of effective remedies, legal assistance in dealing with the justice system, well-trained and gender-sensitive police, and court protocols and procedures that avoid re-victimization, are also critical. Special measures are needed to protect women in situations of increased risk. For example in the United Arab Emirates, judges have received special training on handling cases of abused women and improving the availability of research on domestic violence. The availability of specialized police, prosecutors and courts for cases of violence against women contributes to the effective implementation and enforcement of laws and enhances victims' access to justice. In Kenya for example, the criminal justice system improved its response to violence against women by establishing a special court for prosecution of rape cases and by increasing the capacity of legal professionals. At the same time, guidelines and protocols - such as the ones established by a number of States to date - must be appropriate and contain predictable standards in the implementation of laws. These protocols should be specifically created for police and security forces so that they know how to handle cases of violence against women. Inadequate reporting of cases of violence continues to be a challenge in addressing the issue. According to one estimate, only about 12 per cent of domestic violence cases are reported. Many times over, women who have been physically abused by their partners never contact the police, NGOs or shelters for help – usually out of fear of being stigmatized. Women's knowledge of their rights and how to claim them contributes to ending impunity while dismantling this culture of silence.

Advocacy is critical part of ensuring that States have taken various measures, such as establishing resource centres, conducting awareness campaigns, producing films and brochures and creating websites, to increase women's awareness of their rights and of legal remedies. Increased public awareness may contribute to the prevention of violence against women and many States have initiated or supported awareness-raising campaigns. Such campaigns expose and convey the unacceptability of violence against women and are instrumental in stimulating change. Many have utilized creative and innovative ways to reach diverse audiences, including through use of print media, the Internet, radio, television, film, theatre, art, sports and popular culture, including music and videos. UNFPA works with partners around the globe, in raising awareness on the ground. For example an annual film festival intended to raise awareness of the various forms of violence committed against women in Africa was held in Senegal, while awareness raising skills workshops were conducted for Government members and civil society in Indonesia, and in Morocco where active participation by youth groups made inroads for violence prevention efforts.

Increasingly, evidence is showing that targeting men and boys in gender equality campaign is a necessary strategy. From fathers, to soldiers, to religious leaders - working with men and boys can have powerful impact on stopping violence. For example in various parts of Central Asia and Eastern Europe, partnerships with grassroots non-governmental organizations to promote male

involvement in the prevention and reduction of sexual and gender-based violence through discussion forums and dissemination of behavior change materials are making a difference. Similarly in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, evidence shows that through advocacy and capacity building support with traditional and religious leaders, constituents are more likely to start an open dialogue between themselves and their wives, to identify and overcome obstacles to gender equality, and work to prevent violence against women.

For decades, UNFPA has been working with the military to extend information, education and services on family life and family planning as a key approach. This experience is now being applied to a wider spectrum, including working with all uniformed personnel and by expanding the topics to include other reproductive and sexual health concerns such as maternal health, HIV prevention and reduction of gender-based violence. For example a project in Turkey provided reproductive health and rights as well as gender equality education to new army recruits. It is estimated that this training could potentially reach up to 500,000 new soldiers a year. Similar work was conducted with uniformed personnel in Bhutan and Nepal, which also complements the Fund's work in supporting national partners, including Governments, to protect women and girls in emergency and post-emergency situations particularly from sexual violence, and towards implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325.

Victims/survivors of violence against women require a range of services, including medical, psychological, legal and social services that respond to their short-term injuries, protect them from further violations and address longer-term needs. They also require access to information, counselling and referrals, and safe shelter if they have to flee from their homes. The initiative by the Qatari Supreme Council for Family Affairs of Qatar and its Institution for the Protection of Women and Children, which established the "Children's Friend" telephone service and family consultation centre, are excellent examples of services which respond to those in need. Other examples from the Gulf Region include plans to build refuge shelters for women in Oman. Furthermore, the proposal for a Gulf Region-wide committee designed to respond to domestic violence and other issues faced by women on the Arabian Peninsula, which was recently unveiled at the United Nations, is a leading example of a sub-regional/partnership approach that takes into account gender issues in a comprehensive manner. The proposed committee would oversee efforts to combat violence against women, trafficking of women and children and improve opportunities in schools, colleges and the workplace.

Specialized training is increasingly viewed as essential for the effective implementation of laws as well as the provision of services. It builds the capacity of those who have professional responsibility to address cases of violence against women. In addition, specialized training for those who have the power to influence social norms and practices, including teachers, community leaders and media personnel, can be instrumental in the prevention of violence against women. For example in Papua New Guinea, trainings were held for rural courts to strengthen protection systems such as the establishment of women's centres in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami.

The development of sound and effective policies benefits from quality data and research on the scope, magnitude, causes, consequences and costs of the phenomenon, and States are increasingly ensuring that their policies and programmes are informed by a stronger knowledge base. National partners are working together to mainstream responses to violence against for example through improved national data collection, analyses, surveys and needs assessments. In Jordan for example the collection of sub-national and national data on gender-based violence were pursued through the demographic and health surveys. Such advances in this regard are also being seen here in Qatar. For example, the Government of Qatar reported to the United Nations Secretary General regarding implementation of resolution on the intensification of efforts to eliminate violence against women – which a field study on violence against women had been carried out. Research and studies such as these are critical tools for strengthening evidence, particularly as the prevalence and types of violence perpetrated against women are often times unclear.

Building partnerships is a key strategy as multiple hands are more effective at success. The United Nations places a high premium on partnership building including throughout the Arab States region. Partners such as the Arab League, CAWTAR, PAFAM, AUDI, as well as Al-Azhar University, among others across the globe are critical players in ensuring that women and girls' rights are protected, including their rights to live free from violence and discrimination.

UNFPA would like to thank and commend the Qatar Foundation and its Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development for all of their strides to raise awareness, foster knowledge-sharing and other efforts - including the hosting of this Colloquium. UNFPA very much looks forward to working with the Centre through dialogue, shared learning on the issue of violence against women and gender equality, and exploring areas for fruitful collaboration in the future.

