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"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."

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 8 March 2007

Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions.

At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime – with the abuser usually someone known to her.

The most pervasive human rights violation that we know today, it devastates lives, fractures communities, and stalls development

Statistics paint a horrifying picture of the social and health consequences of violence against women. For women aged 15 to 44 years.

Violence is a major cause of death and disability.

In 1996, the United Nations General Assembly established the UN Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence against Women.

The Trust Fund is managed by UNIFEM and is the only multilateral grant-making mechanism that supports local, national and regional efforts to combat violence.

In 1997, the Trust Fund has awarded more than US\$19 million to 263 initiatives to address violence against women in 115 countries.

Raising awareness of women's human rights, these UNIFEM supported efforts have linked activists and advocates from all parts of the world; shown how small innovative projects impact laws, policies and attitudes; and has begun to break the wall of silence by moving the issue onto public agendas everywhere.

According to the Secretary-General's in-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women, by 2006, 89 States had some form of legislative prohibition on domestic violence, including 60 States with specific domestic violence laws, and a growing number of countries had instituted national plans of action to end violence against women.

This is a clear increase in comparison to 2003, when UNIFEM did a scan of anti-violence legislation and found that only 45 countries had specific laws on domestic violence. Yet high levels of violence against women persist. There is clearly a need for greater focus on implementation and enforcement of legislation, and an end to laws that emphasize family reunification over the rights of women and girls.

“Honour Killings”

In many societies, rape victims, women suspected of engaging in premarital sex, and women accused of adultery have been murdered by their relatives because the violation of a woman's chastity is viewed as an affront to the family's honour.

According to a government report, 4,000 women and men were killed in Pakistan in the name of honour between 1998 and 2003, the number of women being more than double the number of men (30). In a study of female deaths in Alexandria, Egypt, 47 percent of the women were killed by a relative after woman had been raped (31). In Jordan and Lebanon, 70 to 75 percent of the perpetrators of these so-called “honour killings” are the women’s brothers (32).

Ending Violence Against Women

Fighting gender-based violence is a major concern for UNFEM, because violence against women is a universal problem and one of the most widespread violations of human rights. On in three women will suffer some form of violence in her lifetime, becoming part of an epidemic that devastates lives, fractures communities and stalls development. Despite some progress on this issue over the past decade, its horrendous scale remains mostly unacknowledged. New dimensions include the global trafficking of women and girls.

UNIFEM Responds: Strategies That Make a Difference

UNIFEM works on several fronts to interrupt the cycle of violence against women, with an overall objective of linking violence to the source that feeds it: gender inequality. UNFEM multiplies the power of its groundbreaking strategies through advocacy campaigns and close partnerships with governments, women’s groups and other branches of the UN system.

Protective laws and national actions: in a number of countries, UNIFEM works with its partners on establishing legal frameworks to combat violence. Laws alone, however comprehensive they may be, must be followed by plans for specific national actions, which is why UNIFEM is active on this end as well.

Measuring the problem: UNIFEM has been at the forefront of supporting the collection of data and research on violence against women. Much of this information would otherwise not exist, making it impossible to understand the scope of the problem, or devise the means to stop it.

Prevention: Strategies to stop violence before it starts are essential, but lack resources and visibility. UNFEM supports prevention initiative from the local to the international level, including in conflict and post-conflict situations, where violence against women is prevalent and horrific.

Support for women’s organizations: Women’s organizations have developed some of the most creative and effective responses to violence, often in societies where the problem is otherwise largely ignored. UNIFEM helps draw attention and resources to these efforts, and brings the voices of activists together across countries and onto the international stage.

The Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women: Housed within UNIFEM, the Trust Fund offer grants to innovative projects to prevent violence that are run by community, national and regional organizations. With relatively modest sums, grantees have passed new laws, trained police, and involved men and boys in stopping violence. The Trust Fund also collects and shares information about effective strategies that can be replicated or implemented on a larger scale.

Violence affects at least one in three women and girls in the world. Violence against women (VAW) Is rooted in unequal power relations between men and women, so efforts to end VAW must promote women’s empowerment and gender equality. National governments are increasingly instituting legal reforms to put violence against women, once regarded as a private issue, firmly on the public agenda.

Ending VAW is also at the top of the international peace, security, human rights and development agendas. In 2008, the United Nations Secretary-General launched the Unite to End Violence Against Women Campaign, which calls on governments, civil society, the private sector and the entire United Nations system to meet the challenge by 2015, the deadline for achieving the



Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Security Council, whose resolutions impose mandatory obligations on States with penalties for non-compliance, recently passed Resolution 1820 which recognizes that, when used as a tactic of war, sexual violence against civilians “may impede the restoration of international peace and security.

States are obligated, under the due diligence standard, to respond as effectively as their capacity and resources allow to investigate prosecute, provide remedies for and, importantly, prevent violence against women. Building national accountability to address VAW requires simultaneous efforts at the levels of mandates, procedures, and deep culture in all of the institutions that prevent and prosecute violence and address the needs of survivors.

MANDATE REFORM

National legislation that prevents and penalizes all forms of violence against women and girls must be enacted. According to the Secretary-General’s In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women, 89 countries had instituted by 2006 some form of legislative prohibition on domestic violence. In Liberia, one of the first laws passed following the election of President Johnson Sirleaf was a strong law criminalizing rape and making it a non-parole offence so suspects cannot return to communities to intimidate victims and witnesses.

National law must be harmonized with international and regional human-rights instruments and standards. General Recommendation 19 of the CEDAW Committee addresses violence against women and has been referred to by national courts, including the Indian Supreme Court, to secure women’s rights.

It is critical to monitor implementation of international and regional commitments and use relevant complaints mechanisms, such as the Inter-American Convention Belem do Para or the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

Reliable data on VAW must be collected and made public. Information is central to informed policy and program development and monitoring.

This includes population-based surveys on the multiple manifestations of violence against women and girls, their prevalence, causes, consequences, and the impact of interventions over the medium to longer-term; service-level data to assess sector performance (health, judicial and security); and surveys on attitudes and behaviors. The task of building data on VAW is made more challenging by the fact that VAW is one of the least reported crimes and, so shown in Figure 1.11, charges are pressed in only a fraction of cases.

PROCEDURAL CHANGES

National policy and funding frameworks must be developed. National Action Plans exclusively devoted to addressing violence against women serve as a valuable instrument for establishing the institutional, technical and financial resources required for a holistic, coordinated, multi-sectoral approach. These plans must aim to provide for a ‘frontline’ response from the police, medical and livelihood support services, in addition to legal services and long-term prevention.

Standard operating procedures and performance measures must be changed to translate laws and action plans into new practices. Presidential or ministerial decrees and protocols that assign roles and responsibilities to the ministries involved, and set minimal operating and performance standards, can support the implementation of laws and policies.

Resources must be earmarked to finance the wide range of actions to address VAW. Costs range from financing law enforcement reform and paying for health care, to ensuring free access (fee waivers, transportation) for poor women and girls. In August 2007, the President of Brazil announced US\$590 million to implement the new Maria da Penha Law on violence

against women. The budgetary pledge is a leading example of a substantial allocation for implementation of legislation. The United Nations Trust Fund to End violence Against Women, the principal fund dedicated for this issue, received total contributions of \$10 million from its founding in 1996 to 2004, with that total climbing to a committed \$40 million for the period 2005-2008. by comparison, the Global fund on HIV and AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis has reached over \$10 billion since its establishment in 2002. a telling measure of accountability will be whether the Secretary-General's campaign target for the Trust Fund of reaching a minimum of US\$100 million per year by 2015 will be met. Monitoring mechanisms must be inclusive at both national and local levels, to bring together the government, women's and other civil- society organizations, experts and researchers. For example Afghanistan established an inter-ministerial commission on violence against women via Presidential decree, with UNIFEM support.

CULTURAL CHANGE

Empower women and girls, mobilize men and boys. Real and lasting change to end violence against women and girls needs to be grounded at the community level, where acts of abuse occur and where women should be able to demand their rights to justice, protection and support.

Involving men and boys in actions to prevent and respond to violence against women is critical to finding a meaningful solution. A vibrant, well-informed civil society, armed with hard data, empowered with knowledge of their rights and governments obligations, and equipped to demand accountability is a hallmark of sustained progress.

Launch and sustain campaigns.

Spearheaded by women's movements, campaigns such as 16 Days of Activism have been instrumental in breaking the silence and raising awareness.

UNIFEM crafted and forged the first United Nations Campaign on the issue in Latin America and the Caribbean in the late 1990s, and has continued such efforts, including its most recent global campaign, "Say No", which has garnered hundreds of thousands of signatures from individuals, partner organizations and governments.

As United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon summed up at the launch of the UNITE campaign, "Violence against women and girls makes its hideous imprint on every continent, country and culture".

Its is time to focus on the concrete actions that all of us can and must take to prevent and eliminate this scourge ... it is time to break through the walls of silence, and make legal norms a reality in women's lives.

