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Excellency,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address this colloquium on the impact of violence against women on the family, convened by the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development. Let me first extend my sincere appreciation to you, Mr Secretary-General, and your colleagues in the Institute, for the excellent organization of this event and congratulate you for bringing together a distinguished group of participants. I look forward to the discussions on one of the most widespread human rights violations – violence against women – and ways to better prevent this scourge.

In 2006, the Secretary-General issued an in-depth study on violence against women. This was the first time that the General Assembly was presented with a comprehensive analysis of the scourge of violence against women and girls. In doing so, the Secretary-General in effect lifted the curtain on those forms of violence that occur behind closed doors, within homesteads and far from the view of the authorities and the media. This study has paved the way for Member States to confront some of the very difficult occurrences within their countries, their communities and families.

It is now acknowledged that violence against women and girls is a pervasive global phenomenon, stemming from the historically unequal power relations between men and women and the systemic discrimination against women. Violence against women and girls occurs in many different settings and cuts across all cultures, regions and countries. It takes on many different manifestations and is constantly evolving in new forms. It is perpetrated by family members, friends, colleagues, care givers, strangers, and even by the State or its agents. It is committed in both the private and public spheres, in peacetime, during conflict and its aftermath.

On a daily basis, we read or hear about horrific acts of violence against women – women being brutally raped, murdered, maimed, or trafficked into sexual exploitation. We read or hear less, however, about the beatings, humiliation, intimidation and verbal abuse that countless women suffer in silence throughout their lives. These too are forms of violence against women and girls.

On average, at least one in three women is subject to some form of violence at some time in her life. Many of these acts of violence – physical, sexual and psychological – regrettably occur in a family setting.

The World Health Organization, in a 2005 study on women's health and domestic violence covering ten countries, analyzed data on violence against women by male intimate partners. It found wide variations in prevalence, with the proportion of women who had ever suffered physical violence by a male partner ranging from a low of 13 per cent to a high of 61 per cent.



Violence against women and girls in a family setting takes many forms, starting with the marriage institution itself. Dowry-related violence is known to have left women burnt, maimed or even killed. Girls as young as ten are forced into marriage, often to older men, in some parts of the world with the likelihood of early widowhood. Thus not only are these girls deprived of childhood, but are also thrust into early widowhood. Widows around the world are victims of cruelties, mistreatment and abuse. In some countries, they are banished from their communities while in others they are “inherited” as property by relatives of the deceased spouse. Women are also subjected to “honour” killings. According to the United Nations Population Fund, approximately 5,000 women die every year in “honour” killings perpetrated by family members. In at least 53 countries, marital rape is not a prosecutable offence and even in those countries where it is, less than 5 per cent of rape prosecutions result in convictions.

The family is known around the world to be the custodian of tradition and custom, some of which for women and girls have included harmful practices. More than 130 million girls have suffered from female genital mutilation, perpetrated in the name of custom, by family members.

Women also face pervasive physical, sexual and psychological violence within the general community – in their neighbourhoods, on public transport, in workplaces, schools, and sports clubs, in hospitals and in social institutions. Of the thousands of people trafficked each year, the majority are women and children. Surveys in Europe have shown significant rates of sexual harassment in the workplace, with between 40 and 50 per cent of women in the European Union reporting some form of sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behaviour in the workplace.

During conflict, parties to the conflict, both State and non-State actors, have increasingly resorted to violence against women as a weapon of war, to terrorize, intimidate and destroy communities, to extract information and to take revenge. Increasingly, sexual violence has become a tactic of choice of armed groups, executed as a means of achieving political or military ends.

In all these situations, one thing is clear: violence against women is a violation of women’s human rights and as such carries far-reaching consequences, for the girls and women themselves, their families, communities and can threaten peace and security.

For the women and girls, the following are some consequences: health problems, absenteeism both from school and from work, and in some cases loss of life. In addition, there are direct and indirect costs of violence against women to society as a whole, including lowered economic production, reduced capital formation, diversion of resources to programmes and services for victims/survivors of violence, as well as costs associated with social and political instability. It undermines the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals including the Millennium Development Goals.

Responding to violence against women

The question arises as to how this pandemic can be halted. First, the persistent inequality between men and women must be tackled. Unless the systemic inequalities and discrimination against women are addressed, including in the economic, social and political spheres, violence will persist. Recent developments both at global as well as at regional and national levels point to a growing momentum towards concrete action to address violence against women and girls.

For example, we have in place a strong and comprehensive global legal and policy framework for action against all forms and manifestations of violence against women. International human rights treaties set out States parties’ obligations for the protection and promotion of women’s rights, including their right to a life free from violence. The 1993 United Nations Declaration on the elimination of violence against women, the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and a series of resolutions of the General Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies identified many forms of violence against women, in different settings, and elaborated detailed catalogues of measures to address them. This framework underlines quite clearly that all violence is unacceptable and its prevention and elimination is an obligation and responsibility of all States.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, has since 1994 regularly undertaken in-depth reviews and reported on violence against women around the world. Through analysis, recommendations and country visits, the Special Rapporteur has raised awareness of the causes and consequences of different forms of violence against women, and of international standards in this area.

The Secretary-General's in-depth study helped in accelerating the momentum for action. It illustrated the way forward by highlighting critical measures for achieving measurable progress. It highlights ways by which political will and accountability can be demonstrated, through for example, explicit condemnation of violence, legislative change, development of national action plans, increased resource allocations, research and data collection, systematic documentation of lessons learned and good practices and advocacy and awareness-raising. It also demonstrates the need for concrete action by all stakeholders. The preparatory process engaged Member States, non-governmental organizations, entities of the United Nations system and others around the world and helped build new partnerships, sharpen focus and create a new momentum for more systematic and sustained action.

Also there is now unprecedented commitment to tackling violence against women in conflict situations, as evidenced by the adoption of the landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) which called for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence in armed conflict and put an end to impunity for perpetrators. This landmark resolution has been reinforced by the Council's unanimous adoption this last June of resolution 1820 (2008). The Council unequivocally recognized that sexual violence can be a threat to international peace and security, and that durable peace cannot be built on the suffering of women.

Despite these developments, much needs to be done. This Colloquium may wish to ponder on the following:

- Given the gaps between international standards and national laws, policies and practices to prevent and respond to violence against women, what policies need to be taken to close these gaps;
- Many refer to a home as "a man's castle". How can we provide women and girls a home which they too can call a "woman's castle" in which they would be safe and secure, free from violence;
- Given that the perpetration of violence is largely by men, how can boys and men become active partners in the efforts to eliminate violence;
- How can the negative customs and practices be transformed to ensure the safety and security of women and girls?
- What measures should be taken to ensure documentation of incidences of violence so as to strengthen the empirical base of our work?

The Secretary-General's Campaign "Unite to End Violence against Women"

The Secretary-General of the United Nations responded by spearheading a global effort to reduce, and eventually eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. On 25 February 2008, he launched his Campaign "UNite to End Violence against Women" to raise public awareness and increase political will and resources for preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls.

This Campaign, which will continue until 2015, coinciding with the target date for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, offers ample opportunity to focus on eradication of violence against women and girls. It provides a collective platform to engage a wide range of stakeholders in an unprecedented level of global mobilization, linking their initiatives to the Secretary-General's efforts. Governments, civil society, women's organizations, young people, the private sector, the media, the entire United Nations system, individual women and men, are all called upon to join forces in addressing the global pandemic of violence against women and girls.

From existing global inter-governmental agreements, commitments and policy priorities on violence against women and girls,



five key outcomes have been distilled as the benchmarks which the Campaign aims to inspire all countries to achieve by 2015. These outcomes are:

- National laws are in place and enforced to address and punish all forms of violence against women and girls in line with international human rights standards and with a view to end impunity.
- National plans of action are adopted that are multi-sectoral and adequately resourced, with clear accountability.
- Data collection and analysis systems are institutionalized and periodic surveys are undertaken on prevalence of various forms of violence against women and girls
- National and/or local campaigns are launched and social mobilization engages a diverse range of civil society actors in preventing violence and supporting abused women and girls
- Sexual violence in conflict situations is systematically addressed in all peace and security policy and funding frameworks and mechanisms for protection and prevention of systematic rape are implemented.

The United Nations system will make clearly identifiable contributions to support Member States towards the achievement of these five key outcomes.

The Secretary-General is personally approaching world leaders to spur action through national campaigns. He is urging States to review applicable laws, and to revise them or enact new laws to ensure that violence against women is comprehensively addressed, including criminalization, prevention measures, resources for implementation, support and assistance to victims, and mechanisms to monitor and evaluate implementation and to end impunity. He is calling on regional organizations to set priorities and targets. He is forming a global network of male leaders to assist in mobilizing men and boys to become involved in the struggle to end violence against women; and he will convene a high-level event in 2010 to review what has been accomplished through this Campaign, exchange good practices and map out the steps ahead.

Countless women and girls suffering from violence are today still left without recourse and without any means to change their situations in positive ways. This is why all of us, individually and through our institutions and organizations, must make a commitment to work to eliminate violence against women and girls. States must ensure, that crimes of violence against women and girls are prosecuted, perpetrators brought to justice, the rights of victims protected, and impunity is brought to an end. We must not accept that violence against women and girls remains the most common crime in the world that is least punished. There are no grounds for tolerance and no tolerable excuses. Violence against women is a violation of human rights; it is a crime; and it is unacceptable.

Much good work has been done. Let us build upon our achievements by dedicating ourselves to transform commitments into reality through concrete action. I wish you a successful meeting.