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UNITED NATIONS ENTITY FOR THE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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Abstract: Violence against women and girls is so prevalent that it often receives scant media and legislative attention, yet governments, international organizations, businesses, and civil society groups cannot achieve their respective goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the UN System, if women and girls continue to face constant discrimination and physical and sexual violence.

“Violence against women is the most pervasive violation of human rights, occurring every day in every country and every region, regardless of income or level of development.”¹

“There must be no impunity for gender-based violence. Let me be clear. What we are talking about is not a side issue. It is not a special interest group of concern to only a few. What we are talking about are not only women’s rights but also the human rights of over one half of this globe’s population. . . .Violence against women concerns not only women, but above all the rest of us.”²

Introduction

The unequal and often demeaning treatment of women in all parts of the world is, unfortunately, one of the most profound commonalities between all societies. Even though girls and women comprise half of the world’s population, they are systematically excluded from most centers of power and positions of authority and decision-making, whether in the government, business world, academic community, or even many non-governmental organizations (NGOs). With the creation and establishment of this unequal infrastructure, it should come as no surprise that violence against women persists in all its pernicious forms. The United Nations System has been at the forefront of many different

¹ Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) “Report of the United Nations Development Fund for Women on the elimination of violence against women” E/CN.6/2006/10-E/CN.4/2006/60 December 20, 2005 p. 7.

²Sergio Vieira de Mello, “Violence Against Women – What Next?” Symposium sponsored by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the NGO Committee on the Status of Women Geneva, Switzerland April 8, 2003.

international campaigns and initiatives to improve the status and treatment of women and the UN continues to play a vital role in spurring governments and civil society actors to both outlaw and eliminate violence against women; one vital example of the UN System's commitment to improving the status of women and girls is the designation of achieving gender equality by 2015 as the third of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Valuable progress has been made in many countries in terms of new or strengthened laws punishing all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence and even marital rape – crimes that still go unpunished in far too many societies, – but a great deal remains to be done to change the minds of men as well as to prescribe their behavior. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN), working in concert with other relevant international agencies, governments, and interested civil society stakeholders, must build upon the vital work that has already been finished and help the world community move from eliminating violence against women to preventing any future violence against women.

Forms of Violence Against Women

The various forms of violence that are perpetrated against women often overlap in terms of causes and consequences but it is essential that the international community acknowledges and confronts each of these forms of violence with specific remedies that address the roots of the problem, punish the guilty parties accordingly, and prevent future occurrences. Women face intimate partner violence, honor killings, reproductive and sexual violence, human trafficking, bonded labor and forced prostitution, intimidation, denial of services and opportunities, and even instances of the intentional killing of girl children known as female infanticide. Especially vulnerable populations of women that are frequently overlooked and who may need particular focus from the international community include female migrant workers, women and girls with physical and mental disabilities, internally displaced and refugee women, and female prisoners. Delegates to UNWOMEN will need to further decide when acts of violence against women and girls during situations of armed conflict are severe enough to warrant referral to the UN Security Council and/or the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Scale of the problem

The gravitas of the global dimensions of the endemic problems of violence against women can never be fully expressed through statistics but statistics do form a vital component of informing legislators and related decision-makers about the scale of the problem. According to Amnesty International, at least one third of all women have been beaten, forced into having sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetimes. Amnesty also cites widely reported data that a woman is beaten every 15 seconds in the United States, that 36,000 Russian women are beaten every day by spouses or partners, and that in Zambia 5 women a week are murdered by their spouses or partners.³ In early 2011, a group of US scientists released a report estimating that an average of 48 women and girls

³ Amnesty International, "Making Violence Against Women Count: Facts and Figures – a Summary" May 3, 2004. Found at: <http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGACTION770342004>

are raped every hour in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).⁴ Spain reported a total of 73 killed by their intimate partners in 2010, an increase of over 25% from 2009 figures⁵; coinciding with this surge in intimate partner killings in Spain and elsewhere, many academic researchers, human rights activists, and policymakers have argued that the severity of the recent global economic slowdown/recession may lead to increased violence against women and girls.⁶ UNWOMEN reports that “women and girls comprise 80 percent of the estimated 800,000 people trafficked annually, with the majority (79 percent) trafficked for sexual exploitation.”⁷ These horrific statistics only begin to tell the myriad tales of intense, and often chronic, human suffering and the immense social costs that all this suffering imposes. As is confirmed by these statistics, the brutality that far too many women endure on a regular, and sometimes daily, basis is not restricted to any particular region of the world, any ethnicity, race, religion, or social class. One enormously powerful reason for why violence against women continues to be so pervasive throughout the world is that huge numbers of cases, in some societies an estimated half of all cases, of violence against women are never reported to anyone, much less than the authorities. Amnesty International cites 2002 statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO) that only 3 percent of all rapes are reported to authorities in Chile.⁸ Societies throughout the world need to improve their legislative, police and human rights, and social institutions mechanisms to effectively prohibit, punish, and ultimately prevent violence against women.

Cultural, Economic, Political and Social Impacts of Violence Against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls is an affront to efforts to achieve equality, but it is also an assault on the cultural, economic, political and social integrity of societies everywhere. When women and girls are suffering from the effects of violence or remain silent and scared in the face of threats and intimidation, societies suffer from the withdrawal of their artistic and literary talents, their insights and scientific discoveries, their labor power and entrepreneurial skills, their abilities to negotiate and compromise, and their voices for effective representation of all peoples. While many academics, artists and human rights activists may respond to cultural and social appeals for eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, policymakers and business leaders usually respond more favorably to economic and legal arguments. For many years, systematic study of the economic impacts of violence against women and girls was rarely undertaken but recent economic data is likely to reinforce the cultural and social arguments for preventing violence against women. UNWOMEN cites the figures of a 2003 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study conducted in the United States to highlight the dramatic economic impacts of violence against women and girls. “The

⁴ *BBC News*, “DR Congo: 48 rapes every hour, US study finds” May 12, 2011.

⁵ Raphael Minder, “Spain Struggles to Tackle Domestic Violence” *New York Times* February 23, 2011.

⁶ Amelia Gentleman, “Growth in violence against women feared as recession hits” *The Guardian* London March 4, 2009.

⁷ UNWOMEN, “Violence Against Women – Facts and Figures” 2011.

Found at: <http://www.saynotoviolence.org/issue/facts-and-figures>

⁸ Amnesty International, “Making Violence Against Women Count: Facts and Figures – a Summary”

economic cost of violence against women is considerable — a 2003 report by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that the costs of intimate partner violence in the United States alone exceed US\$5.8 billion per year: US\$4.1 billion are for direct medical and health care services, while productivity losses account for nearly US\$1.8 billion.” These figures are likely considerably higher in 2011 and it is vital to note that these losses are solely the tangible economic losses attributed to intimate partner violence; undoubtedly, the total cost to the US was, and remains, much higher when factoring in all forms of violence against women and girls. Furthermore, economists are responsible for estimating the intangible costs of lost income to women and families. If 2003 tangible economic losses from intimate partner violence for the US alone totaled nearly \$6 billion, delegates must consider what the tangible and intangible economic losses for all forms of violence against women and girls would be in 2011 for their respective countries as well as all humanity. Governments and societies must also calculate the costs of incarcerating perpetrators of violence against women and girls and the consequent loss of income that frequently accompanies the incarceration of a family member. As legislation prescribes harsher penalties for violence against women and enforcement efforts are increased throughout the world, incarceration rates for those committing violence against women and girls are likely to rise, at least in the short term. If effective plans for preventing violence against women and girls are properly implemented, these rates of violence and subsequent incarceration may eventually decline.

Madame President, Madame Speaker

Women are making significant and sustained impacts on the political arenas of their respective societies and around the world. In Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf recently became the first female president in Africa and in January 2007, Nancy Pelosi became the first female Speaker of the House in the United States Congress; as of August 2011, there were at least 20 female presidents, prime ministers, premiers, and governors-general ruling countries around the world, including Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Croatia, Finland, Germany, Liberia, Lithuania, and Slovakia. The hope is that female politicians will be more willing to confront issues of violence against women than some of their male counterparts; thus far, the logic behind this thinking seems to be borne out by some recent legislative initiatives. Female politicians are far more likely to have direct personal experience or to know a female friend or relative who has suffered violence and abuse and they may be more motivated to use the instruments of the state, including the legislature, to affect social change. “Laws are the building blocks, but the overall project of gender equality is linked to the establishment of the rule of law. And that requires a legislature that understands the importance of gender equality for society and for eliminating violence. For this reason, countries such as Argentina, Austria, Ghana, India, Italy, Peru, Senegal and Timor-Leste have experimented with quotas for women’s representation and the CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women] Committee urges governments to reach a minimum of 30 percent representation by women.”⁹ In June 2011, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted that fewer than 30 countries had achieved this goal of 30% female parliamentary

⁹ UNIFEM, “Not a minute more: Ending Violence Against Women” New York 2003 p. 38.

representation and urged countries to take further steps to promptly achieve this goal.¹⁰ Many legislatures are currently enacting new or stronger measures to prevent and punish violence against women as well as to provide protection, health services, and counseling for the victims of violence against women but these initiatives are far from universal.

Outlawing Intimate Partner Violence and Marital Rape

Momentum for outlawing violence against women is certainly accelerating. As of 2006, at least 89 countries had enacted specific legislation against domestic violence, more than 100 countries currently recognize marital rape as a crime, and legislatures are directing more resources towards services for treating the victims of violence against women.¹¹ Unfortunately, however, some of these laws still reflect patriarchal thinking, thus lessening much of their preventive and punitive capacity. “Rape laws, for example, sometimes provide loopholes for perpetrators by dropping charges if the rapist marries his victim as is the case in Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Romania. Other countries may require a witness to a rape or domestic violence before a case can be brought to court, even though both types of attack rarely occur in public.”¹² Eliminating these egregious loopholes and drafting new laws are essential first steps for many countries. Enforcement of existing laws, and of laws that are currently being drafted or will be drafted in the future, is absolutely fundamental for all societies.

Training the police to listen to the victims

For the hundreds of millions of women who have been abused or suffered from violence, their situations are all too frequently made much worse by police and security officials who are disbelieving, patronizing, and even hostile to women who report acts of violence. Women frequently state that when they report crimes and violence committed against them, police officers, especially not exclusively male police officers, often evince disbelief and/or do not take their concerns seriously. “In country after country, women report that the police are also insensitive and may fail to adequately investigate gender-based crimes. Some women have reported that when they went to the police to report a rape, male officers would make light of it, even asking whether they enjoyed the experience.”¹³ One truly reprehensible reason for the lack of concern shown by many police and security forces is that members of the police and security forces routinely commit acts of violence, including sexual assault and rape, against women. UN peacekeeping soldiers have committed acts of violence, especially sexual violence, against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as well as other parts of the world. As a result of these deplorable actions in the DRC and other countries hosting peacekeeping missions, the UN Secretariat has focused on improving the national police forces of countries as cornerstone of successful post-conflict peacekeeping and

¹⁰ UN News Centre, “UN chief calls for specific steps to close gender gap in parliaments” June 30, 2011. Found at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=38893&Cr=gender&Cr1=>

¹¹ UNWOMEN, “Violence Against Women” 2011.

Found at: http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/

¹² UNIFEM, “Not a minute more: Ending Violence Against Women” p. 43.

¹³ UNIFEM, “Not a minute more: Ending Violence Against Women” p. 46.

peacebuilding. To eliminate violence against women, governments and interested civil society stakeholders must improve the human rights training of police and security officers and crimes committed by police and security officers must be prosecuted and punished no less stringently than crimes committed by ordinary citizens.

It takes a village

Effective enforcement of the laws is primarily the duty of states but civil society groups must be constantly and directly involved in this enforcement and implementation if violence against women is going to be eliminated. According to UNIFEM, now UNWOMEN, “implementation also requires monitoring, a task that is all too often left to women’s machineries, which tend to be under-funded and lack influence. NGOs monitoring role is important for accountability, but they lack resources for national coverage and many would welcome associations with mainstream human rights organizations that have a broader public outreach and political influence.”¹⁴ Put simply, states often must be coaxed, encouraged, prodded, and even shamed into drafting, implementing, and enforcing the laws and policies that are necessary to effectively eliminate all forms of violence against women, particularly in light of recent budget cuts for social services, including treatment of rape victims¹⁵, in many countries. NGO alliances and networks such as the Stop Action Against Violence¹⁶ project in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and the Muslim Women’s Fund (MWF)¹⁷ currently operating in Egypt, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) provide vital curriculum materials and funds for campaigns to eliminate violence against women and girls, including intimate partner abuse and female genital mutilation (FGM).

UN System Actions

With the current UN System emphasis on gender mainstreaming and achieving gender equality for women and girls, it is not surprising that initiatives and programs to end violence against women and girls are being implemented by a number of UN agencies and bodies. In March 2009, the UN launched the Secretary-General’s Database on Violence Against Women¹⁸; delegates to UNWOMEN may find it extremely useful to consult the Secretary-General’s Database on Violence Against Women as there are country pages for all 192 member states listing national legislation and programs extant in those respective countries. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spearheads the UNiTE to End Violence Against Women campaign while UNWOMEN’s Say **NO** to Violence Against Women initiative is designed to achieve “the objectives of the *UNiTE* campaign through social mobilization.”¹⁹ UNWOMEN also recently released its first major report

¹⁴ UNIFEM, “Not a minute more: Ending Violence Against Women” p. 50.

¹⁵ John Eglon, “In Cuts, Fears for Program that Assists Rape Victims” *New York Times* June 7, 2011.

¹⁶ Stop Violence Against Women: A project of the Advocates for Human Rights, 2011. <http://stopvaw.org/>

¹⁷ Women’s Funding Network, “Muslim Women’s Fund” 2011.

Found at: <http://www.womensfundingnetwork.org/the-network/member/muslim-womens-fund>

¹⁸The UN Secretary-General’s Database on Violence Against Women may be accessed at: <http://webapps01.un.org/vawdatabase/home.action>

¹⁹ UNWOMEN, “Violence Against Women” 2011.

on achieving gender equality and ending violence against women in July 2011.²⁰ The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) are working jointly to reduce the rate of female genital mutilation (FGM) and cutting by 40% between 2008 and 2012 in at least 12 countries in Africa.²¹ The World Health Organization (WHO) conducts cross-national studies of domestic violence and women’s health emergencies as well as coordinates high-level meetings with regional and national health agencies to prevent intimate partner and other sexual violence against women and girls. In December 2010, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) passed resolutions against trafficking in women and girls (A/RES/65/190) and “Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women” (A/RES/65/187), with the latter resolution calling for UN member states to ensure that crimes and violence against women are effectively monitored, recorded, and punished, that barriers to women obtaining needed health and legal services be eliminated, and urging states to adequately fund the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women.²² Focusing more specifically on the crime of rape, particularly instances of mass and systematic rape during situations of armed conflict, the UN System is addressing further instances of sexual violence through the “Say NO to Violence Against Women”, the United Nations inter-agency initiative “Stop Rape Now: United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict.” These initiatives are intended to buttress the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC) as well as various ad hoc tribunals convened to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity in situations such as the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone.

The plethora of agencies, bodies, initiatives and programs in the United Nations System aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls illustrates the depth of official concern but it is essential that these initiatives and programs yield positive and sustainable results. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s UNiTE to End Violence Against Women was launched in 2008 and is designed to bring national and local governments, international organizations including the UN System, civil society actors, private sector partners, and the media to highlight the pervasiveness of violence against women and girls, to mobilize these respective social actors and to encourage governments to enact and implement national legislation by 2015 that confronts and punishes all forms of violence against women and girls. One component of this UNiTE campaign that has garnered important media attention is the creation of the Secretary-General’s Network of Men Leaders that includes such well-known figures as author Paulo Coelho, former President of Colombia César Gaviria Trujillo, former Prime Minister of Spain José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and two Nobel Peace Prize winners: Grameen Bank Founder Muhammed Yunus of Bangladesh and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Mpilo Tutu. The work of the UNiTE campaign is critically undergirded by the “Say **NO** to Violence Against Women” initiative that seeks to mobilize social actors,

Found at: http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/

²⁰ UNWOMEN, “2011-2012 Progress of the World’s Women: In Pursuit of Justice” July 2011. The entire report may be accessed at: <http://progress.unwomen.org/>

²¹ UN Department of Public Information (UNDPI), “Millennium Development Goal #3 Fact Sheet” New York September 2010 DPI/2650 C p. 2.

²² A/RES/65/187 December 21, 2010 pp. 6-8.

including women and human rights activists, to push for stronger legislation and policies designed to prevent violence against women and girls and to punish the perpetrators accordingly when such violence occurs.

Addressing the issue of sexual issue in situations of armed conflict is widely viewed as an essential or “core ‘protection of civilians’ issue.”²³ In reference to the previously cited estimate of 1 rape occurring every 48 minutes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), in July 2011 Navi Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, called for an investigation into serious allegations that Congolese soldiers subjected “ ‘47 women, including one minor, to sexual violence, including rape, abducted two civilians, and inflicted cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment on 12 other civilians.”²⁴ The UN Security Council and the International Criminal Court (ICC) are working jointly to prosecute instances of mass and systematic rape in situations of armed conflict; when examining the cases currently before the ICC, rape and/or sexual slavery are cited amongst the list of crimes for the defendants in at least half of the proceedings.²⁵

The UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women was established in 1996 by UN General Assembly resolution 50/166 (A/RES50/166) and provided over \$60 million to some 317 initiatives in 124 countries over the past 15 years.²⁶ In June 2010, UNWOMEN, with support from the UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women (UN Trust Fund), coordinated a 3-day workshop in New Delhi, India with the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) to improve safety for female passengers on the Delhi bus system. Another grantee from the UN Trust Fund, the Jordanian Women’s Union (JWU), received funds to establish and expand nongovernmental organization (NGO) networks in Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco to combat illegal trafficking of women and girls.²⁷ Delegates to UNWOMEN may wish to suggest increases in voluntary funding for the UN Trust Fund to pay for additional initiatives and programs.

²³ Remarks by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Sexual Violence in Conflict Margot Wallstrom quoted from Ingrid Marie Breidlid, Cedric de Coning, Rebecca Jovin & P.K. Singh, “Report of the Conference on Peacekeeping Vision 2015: Capabilities for Future Mandates” New Delhi April 6-8, 2011 p. 22. Conference proceedings may be accessed at:

http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/pk_vision_2015_conference_report.pdf

²⁴ UN News Centre, “UN report calls for prosecution of perpetrators of mass rape in DR Congo” July 22, 2011. Found at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39120&Cr=democratic&Cr1=congo>

²⁵ United Nations General Assembly, “Report of the International Criminal Court” A/65/313 August 19, 2010. The full report may be accessed at: <http://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/EA7DF985-4549-40EF-A0DC-814BE440655C/282599/ICC6RepEng.pdf>

²⁶ UNWOMEN, “UN Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence Against Women” 2011.

Found at: http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/trust_fund.php

²⁷ UNWOMEN, “Trust Fund Grantees: 14th Cycle (2009)” 2011. Found at:

http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/trust_fund_grantees.php

Conclusion

Violence against women and girls remains an alarmingly common phenomenon around the world. Stories of mass rape and sexual violence in situations of armed conflict in the DR Congo and Libya may garner critical media attention for a few days, particularly coinciding with the release of high level reports about the prevalence of rape as a weapon of war or an indictment from the International Criminal Court (ICC), but the constancy of these and other forms of violence against women and girls often render them unlikely to capture and/or remain in the daily headlines. Effectively confronting and eliminating violence against women and girls will require constant and unflinching engagement on the part of national and local governments, international organizations, academics, activists, civil society organizations, employers and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Guiding Questions:

What is the current situation regarding violence against women and girls in your country? Does your government monitor relevant data and trends of violence against women and girls? What laws, programs and punishments currently exist in your country to prevent and/or punish violence against women and girls?

Has your government signed and/or ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)? If not, does your government plan to do so before 2015? Has your government signed and/or ratified any relevant regional conventions aimed at eliminating violence against women, such as the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence as well as the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women?

What official networks of support exist in your country for women and girls who have been threatened with or have suffered violence, particularly rape and sexual assault? What activist, informal, and nongovernmental networks of support exist in your country for women and girls who are threatened with or suffer violence?

Is your country working with the UN System through the UNiTE to End Violence Against Women, the “Say **NO** to Violence Against Women” campaigns, and/or the UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women? If so, what have been the results of these campaigns, initiatives, and programs?

Does your country provide and/or require educational programs and curricula designed to prevent violence against women and girls? Does your country encourage the formation of men’s leadership networks designed to eliminate violence against women and girls?

How can the UN System and the International Criminal Court (ICC) expedite the prosecution of perpetrators of rape and sexual violence in armed conflict?

