

25 November 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against
Women**

Women have the right to live their lives free from violence in any form. The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is an occasion for governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society to publicly take a stand against this abhorrent and inhumane practice. Equally important, it provides the opportunity to recommit to a world free from discrimination of any kind, one in which equality, development and peace is a reality for all women.

For now, the reality for many women and girls worldwide is a horrific life impaired by domestic violence, sexual abuse and sexual harassment, forced prostitution, trafficking, practices that impact the health of women and girls and other forms of violence. Violence against women is a worldwide phenomenon, which knows no national, ethnic, cultural, age or class boundaries.

Not only is violence against women a violation of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, but it is also an affront to their dignity and is recognized as an obstacle to socio-economic development. Therefore, states and societies have an obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish act of violence, whether perpetrated by the agents of the state or private persons, and to provide protection for victims.

The United Nations continues to be central to raising public awareness on the issue of violence of women, and has provided essential leadership through the elaboration of legal norms, policies and programmes in this area, including the Declaration on Violence against Women and in the Beijing Platform of Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. They provide a framework within which states should meet their obligations to create and sustain an environment in which violence against women is not just unacceptable behavior - it is illegal.

It is encouraging that progress has been made in this area in recent years. In that regard, more governments are introducing legislation and other measures to combat and eliminate violence against women. The United Nations itself has created specific mandates for addressing the issues of violence against women, its causes and consequence, and knowledge about the forms, incidence, and other issues related to violence against women has improved.

The United Nations may set standards and norms, governments may legislate and introduce protective measures, but such actions cannot by themselves prevent violence against women. Attitudes must change. It must be accepted by society as a whole that violence against women and girls is wrong, and this must be inculcated from childhood and through every stage of our

development. If national and international objectives to end the violence that impact the lives of so many women are to be achieved, it is important that women themselves have an essential role, particularly at the policy and decision-making levels.

The elimination of violence against women is unfinished business. This grave injustice can no longer be condoned, ignored, or tolerated. Women should not believe that their only option is to suffer indignity, often surrounded by a wall of silence. We have an obligation, both moral and legal to break down the walls of silence and to take decisive action to end the violence.