**Commission on the Status of Women**
**Fifty-sixth session**
**27 February-9 March 2012**

**Panel discussion**
**"Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls"**
**Wednesday, 29 February 2012, 1:15 – 2:45 p.m.**

**ISSUES PAPER**

## I.      Introduction

In accordance with the methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women (ECOSOC resolution 2006/9), UN-Women organizes a panel event in the margins of each annual session to enable a preliminary discussion on the priority theme of the subsequent session. During the fifty-sixth session of the Commission, a panel discussion on "Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls" will be organized in preparation for the Commission's fifty-seventh session in 2013.

## II.      Background

Violence against women and girls is rooted in gender inequality. It is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world. Over the past three decades, through the sustained and dedicated advocacy efforts of the women's movement, the issue has been positioned as a priority in national, regional and international policy agendas. The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, identified violence against women as one of the 12 critical areas of concern that required urgent action to achieve the goals of equality, development and peace, and during its five-year review, the call for such action was re-iterated.[1]

The international community has further committed itself to eliminate such violence, and States' obligations are elaborated in international[2] and regional human rights treaties,[3] documents emanating from United Nations conferences[4] and summits, as well as resolutions adopted by United Nations bodies.[5] An in-depth study on all forms and manifestations of violence against women, issued by the United Nations Secretary-General,[6] and his campaign *UNiTE to End Violence against Women* contributed to the global momentum to address such

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[1] See General Assembly resolution S-23/3, annex, para. 69.
[2] The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) does not explicitly refer to violence against women. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in its general recommendation No.12 (1989), noted States' obligation to protect women from violence, and in its general recommendation No.19 (1992), confirmed that violence against women constitutes a form of discrimination and that discrimination is a major cause of such violence.
[3] Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará); Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa; Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.
[4] Including the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993) and its outcome documents (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action) which also supported the creation of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.
[5] Including the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 19 December 1993.
[6] United Nations Study of the Secretary-General, *Ending violence against women-From words to action* (2006), A/61/122/Add.1 and Corr.1.

violence.  A growing number of States are intensifying their efforts to prevent and address violence against women.

It is now clearly recognized that a systematic, comprehensive, multi-sectoral and sustained approach is necessary to address all forms of violence against women and girls. Such an approach should include legislative and policy measures, protection, services and access to justice for victims, prosecution and punishment of offenders, prevention, educational and awareness-raising measures, training and advocacy, and data collection and research.

Much work has been done in these areas.  In order to facilitate a focused and targeted approach to the priority theme of the Commission in 2013, emphasis will be placed on victims/survivors' access to support services and primary prevention, that is preventing violence from occurring in the first place.[7] Such a focused approach is expected to enable a thorough consideration of remaining gaps and to accelerate progress in these two key areas.

The need for support services is stressed in global and regional legal and policy documents.[8] These services are crucial as they can protect victims/survivors and contribute to preventing violence from recurring. They also demonstrate to the public that such violence is not to be tolerated. Efforts have been made to expand availability of and access to services, including safe shelter, medical, psychological, legal and social services.

Primary prevention on the other hand, is an area where much work remains to be done, where there are few and limited initiatives and less clarity about good practices.[9] Intergovernmental bodies have recently placed an increasing focus on primary prevention of violence against women. The General Assembly has called States to increase their focus on prevention.[10] The Human Rights Council stressed the significant role of primary prevention.[11]

The Commission on the Status of Women considered the question of violence against women and girls in its agreed conclusions of 1998 on violence against women,[12] and its agreed conclusions of 2007 on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child,[13] addressing the need for both support services to victims/survivors and prevention initiatives.

## III.    Critical issues

Country data reveals that as many as seven in ten women in the world report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime.[14] Violence against women has

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[7] The World Health Organization's *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002), considers, apart from primary prevention, secondary: an immediate response after violence has occurred to limit its extent and consequences; and tertiary: longer-term care and support for those who have suffered violence.

[8] See, for example, General Assembly resolutions 61/143, 62/133, 63/155. 64/137, 65/187; and Human Rights Council resolution A/RES/14/12

[9] See footnote no.6.

[10] See General Assembly resolution 65/187.

[11] A/HRC/14/12 on accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: ensuring due diligence in prevention.

[12] E/1998/27-E/CN.6/1998/12.

[13] E/2007/27-E/CN.6/2007/9.

[14] National surveys on prevalence of violence against women reveal that 15 to 76 percent of women in the world report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime, UN-Women, *Fact sheet: Violence against Women and the Millennium Development Goals (2010)*.

devastating effects for individuals, communities and nations. It leads to physical, mental and sexual health problems.[15] Violence bears significant economic and social costs and constrains the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.[16] Certain groups of women and girls,[17] which are exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, face even greater risks of violence.[18] Some of the persisting challenges to eliminating violence against women include impunity of perpetrators and barriers to victims/survivors' access to justice and effective reparations.[19]

Despite intensified efforts, support services are of limited scope, coverage and quality in many countries around the world. Access to such services can be especially problematic for women in rural and remote areas, or women belonging to excluded groups or ethnic minorities, indigenous and migrant women, adolescent girls, and those with disabilities or living with HIV/AIDS, among others.[20] Fear, shame and stigmatization are major barriers preventing women from disclosing violence against them and seeking assistance and support, even where services may be available.

In order to support access to such services, in addition to fostering an enabling environment at societal and community levels, women need to be informed about service availability and their rights in reference to such services. Yet, outreach and the dissemination of such information tend to be limited. When victims/survivors actually decide to seek support, they often experience further trauma because the services in place fail to provide an effective and comprehensive response to their needs.

Other gaps and challenges relate to service providers' qualifications and training, including on rights-based and gender-sensitive service provision. Guidelines and protocols, effective coordination and referral systems, as well as systematic monitoring and evaluation of available services also remain lacking. The lack of resources also constitutes a significant barrier to the provision of effective services.

While improvements in the availability and delivery of support services remains of vital importance, it is increasingly recognized that preventing violence before it occurs can have a significant impact on the health, social and economic well-being of individuals, families, communities and societies.[21] The persistence of attitudes, behaviours and gender stereotypes that perpetuate discrimination against women remains a significant challenge to preventing such violence. Emerging research indicates that violence against women and girls can be prevented and its impact reduced, and that factors contributing to gender-based violence can be changed.

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[15] World Health Organization, *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women-Taking action and generating evidence (2010)*.

[16] World Health Organization, *Addressing violence against women and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (2005)*.

[17] Including indigenous and migrant women, adolescent girls, those from rural areas or ethnic minorities, women with disabilities or living with HIV/AIDS, among others.

[18] Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*, 2 May 2011, (A/HRC/17/26).

[19] Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*, 23 April 2010 (A/HRC/14/22).

[20] See footnote no17.

[21] See footnote no 6.

In order to prevent violence against women and girls, political commitment and leadership at all levels are critical in changing societal attitudes that condone such violence and perpetuate discrimination against women. The involvement of multiple stakeholders, including representatives of the media, men and boys, young people, women's groups and civil society organizations, religious and community leaders, and the private sector, needs to complement political commitment and leadership.

Although States have been increasingly adopting measures aimed at primary prevention, such measures are often limited in scope and duration. Knowledge must be strengthened to better understand what works, and why; and how multi-faceted efforts, sustained over time can address the complex sets of factors underpinning gender inequality and tolerance for violence against women. In order to achieve results, prevention needs to constitute an integral part of a comprehensive approach in laws, policies, programmes and budgets. Much greater efforts are needed to enhance monitoring and evaluation of impact of measures taken and results achieved.

**IV.     Format and outcome of the interactive expert panel**

The panel will take the form of an interactive dialogue. Three expert panelists will make presentations of no more than ten minutes. Member States, United Nations system entities and non-governmental organizations will be encouraged to share experiences, raise issues that should be considered within the theme, and/or respond to the panelists' presentations. Interventions from the floor will be limited to three minutes. The dialogue is part of the preparations for 2013, and will be available via webcast. A moderator's summary of the dialogue will be prepared and posted on the website of UN-Women.

**V.     Issues for consideration in the interactive dialogue**

The following issues could be considered:

- What are the key areas where new and concerted policy measures and interventions are necessary to strengthen support services for women victims/survivors of violence and primary prevention?
- What are the main gaps and challenges in providing comprehensive support services to women victims/survivors of violence? What initiatives have been effective in overcoming these gaps and challenges and how can those be scaled up?
- How can support services be effectively provided to remote areas or to particular groups of women victims/survivors of violence, such as rural and indigenous women, women living with HIV/AIDS, women with disabilities, adolescent girls and younger women?
- What initiatives are emerging as promising and effective in primary prevention and how can those be scaled up? How have those initiatives been evaluated and assessed?
- What are the main gaps and challenges in primary prevention of violence against women and girls? How can those be closed?