

**United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-seventh session
4 - 15 March 2013
New York**

INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

on

**“Elimination and Prevention of all forms of Violence Against
Women and Girls”**

Tuesday, 5 March 2013 from 3:00pm to 6:00pm

Focus: Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls

From Ideas to Action:

Preventing Violence against Women and Girls

**Feed-back on the Expert Group Meeting on Preventing Violence against
Women and Girls - Bangkok 2012**

by

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All customs and practices began somewhere, with someone. My new practice is simple. It is this - before I begin to speak about violence against women and girls I must pay tribute to the girls and women who live with violence every day – to those who have survived and to those who have not. I also pay tribute to those activists, who, have and continue to, challenge violence against women and girls.

As we gather here today, and over the next few days, girls and women in all of our countries, in our communities and in our families are at risk of, or actually experiencing violence. Some of those girls and women will not survive today, or the next few days; and by the time this year's CSW ends, several more girls and women would have died at the hands of partners, strangers, family members, soldiers, traffickers, pimps and even at the hands of those first new teenage loves.

It is understandable then that we have spent most of our collective energies focussed on providing services which address the immediacy of need i.e. responding to crises or (where possible) offering services which work to reduce the impact of the trauma experienced by survivors of violence. But while support services are essential, they are simply not enough if we are to truly transform the landscape for girls and women. If we are to ensure that violence against women and girls is eliminated then we have prevent to it from happening in the first place.

Background

In September 2012, UN women, as a part of the preparation for this year's Commission on the Status of Women, collaborated with a number of agencies from the UN System i.e. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to organise the first ever UN Expert Group Meeting on Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls.

This ground-breaking collaboration brought together nineteen experts, from a wide range of disciplines, to help to set the context for truly getting prevention on the

agenda for CSW57. The group included practitioners, advocates, academics, activists and educators and researchers. We also had a small number of observers including two from government; and the entire process was supported by an independent consultant, who is also an expert in violence against women and girls prevention. The work of that week led to the preparation of a comprehensive report, which has helped to shape some of the dialogue around prevention which will take place over this two week period.

For further details on how the work was organised, our approach etc., please read the report. It is available online at the UN Women site.

Establishing the Parameters and the Context

I now want to share with you some of issues that arose, purely around parameters, contexts and differences.

The EGM was an intense five days of sharing, learning, challenge, reflection, debate, disagreement and in many cases consensus. The range and diversity of participants led to a richness of conversation and the development of a number of recommendations, but very quickly into the process, we recognised that we had to get some of the basics resolved. It was clear that the term prevention meant different things to different people and we acknowledge that this is in, and of itself a key challenge as we work to strengthen the focus on prevention. So for the purposes of the EGM and the subsequent report, prevention was defined as:

'prevention of violence against women and girls before it occurs, that is, by identifying and addressing its underlying causes and promoting shifts in the social environment that ultimately reduce the number of new incidences of violence against women and girls.'

Through the expert presentations and the dialogue a number of ideas, perspectives and patterns emerged which describes the context in which violence against women and girls is perpetrated in today's world. Some key areas of concern for us were:

- The impacts of the current global economic crisis which include displacement, mass migration and increased levels of deep poverty - we know that this in turn increases the vulnerability of girls and women to multiple forms of abuse including trafficking and sexual exploitation.
- The on-going normalisation of violence against women and girls which is exacerbated by other social inequalities, militarisation, extreme nationalism and a growth in all forms of religious fundamentalisms.
- The emergence of new, previously unexplored or poorly understood sites of violence and risk for girls and women - this includes virtual spaces and new media systems which are being increasingly used to groom, 'set-up' and victimise girls and women. We were also concerned about how women and in particular young women are located in urban, serious youth violence and armed violence contexts. We know for example from work carried out in countries such as Brazil and the UK that women who are in relationships with, or connected to 'gang' members, are at high risk of experiencing domestic and sexual violence including sexual exploitation and trafficking.
- The relentless objectification of girls and women in the media is a cause of deep worry, but we were particularly concerned about the impacts on girls and younger women who are much more likely to be engaged with social networking, different forms of instant messaging etc. The easy access to even the most extreme pornography poses a real challenge around the messages that all young people are accessing around femininity and masculinity, safety, harm and respect.

We know that we have the foundations and structures for preventing violence against women and girls within our international global policy and legislative frameworks. For example, the report references Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security 1325, 1820, 1888/9 and 1960 and of course Beijing Platform for Action. In addition a number of treaties and conventions exist which support a stronger intersectional approach as it relates to specific social groups. The report highlights the existence of a number of regional

frameworks which also have requirements for preventing violence against women and girls. So given that we have the foundations and structures, what are we waiting for? What is going wrong?

Brief Summary of Key Findings

In the key finding section we note that it is not all doom and gloom. We know that many women's organisations and other civil society organisations have been engaging in prevention work for a long time, and indeed recent research suggests that it is feminist activism which has had the single biggest impact on effecting change around violence against women and girls; and we know that over the last few years, prevention has begun to make its way into the agenda through national strategies and action plans; and in many ways the richness of the discussions at the EGM was evidence of this. As a group of experts we were keen to acknowledge this, but also to reiterate that prevention of violence against women and girls is a positive thing. Prevention of violence against women and girls, contextualised within an understanding of equality will be beneficial for all our families, communities and societies. Prevention of violence against women and girls simply makes sense.

Critically though we noted that while women's organisations and other CSOs have been at the forefront of prevention activities, current and previous programmes have tended to be limited by lack of resources, geographical reach etc. While short term and ad hoc programs are useful for the people who are impacted – they do not in and of themselves deliver the widespread long term change that is needed. Without States fulfilling their obligations for preventing violence against women and girls as outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action we will not achieve the required transformation. We also noted that unless work to prevent violence against women and girls is linked to actions to address gender inequality in all our societies, the work will not be meaningful.

It was important that experts discuss the role of men and boys in prevention activities and while this is covered in more detail in the report, I can say this. Men and boys'

participation must be an essential component of preventing violence against women and girls. This includes work which addresses constructions of masculinity, supports non-violent approaches to conflict and which supports rather than replaces women's leadership.

Recommendations

This leads perfectly into the recommendations

As I am sure you can well imagine experts had a number of recommendations which it is impossible to do justice to in this paper, so I will list the overarching focus of the recommendations and comment on only three of them. I should also explain the rationale behind the way the recommendations are organised: experts were clear that we need strong, clear leadership on violence against women and girls prevention and that this needs to be structured in ways that lift the profile and scale of activity, but we also recognised that those areas of work that are emerging, or are poorly understood, or de-prioritised within our collective agendas would need to be highlighted for specific focus.

The first four headlines then address the wider context of violence against women and girls while the others are more specific:

- 1) A Global Implementation Plan to End Violence against Women and Girls
- 2) A Global Advocacy Plan for Prevention
- 3) Integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls
- 4) Research on the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls and the effectiveness of prevention measures
- 5) Mass and new media
- 6) The global financial crisis and geo-politics
- 7) Urban, serious youth (e.g. gang) and armed violence
- 8) Humanitarian crises related to conflict and natural disasters
- 9) Girls, adolescent girls and young women

So just to comment on three areas:

Firstly, a Global Implementation Plan to End Violence against Women and Girls (with a particular focus on prevention). Let me immediately state that this is not an attempt to replace or dilute the existing policy and legislative frameworks. The plan would be launched in 2015 in order to support the post-2015 development agenda, and would provide a mechanism which operationalises the current policy, legislative and normative frameworks in a coordinated and outcomes focussed way.

Secondly, integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls - While as a group of experts we may have been ambitious i.e. we want to end violence against women and girls in a generation. We were also pragmatic in that we recognise that a global implementation plan requires development time and effort. So experts recommend that, in the immediate and short term, States, work in partnership with donors, funder, international and regional institutions, women's and other civil society organisations to *'develop, implement, evaluate and monitor coordinated, multi-sectoral and sustained prevention strategies, alongside and reinforcing strategies to improve the response to existing violence.'*

Thirdly, the global financial crisis and geopolitics – work around violence against women and girls, and especially work around prevention, is easily a soft-target for funding cuts. But given the disproportionate impacts of the global economic crisis on women and the increased risks of violence and the pressure on services, it is essential that States prioritise investment in programmes which not only support survivors but which create attitudinal shifts. We cannot afford for one of the main tragic legacies of this period to be the harming and murdering of thousands of girls and women. If this happens then the consequences will be with us for generations to come.

I have tried to condense the work of five days, numerous documents and a fifty-one page report into this short presentation. It is impossible to have done justice to all of that effort and the excellent document that was produced but I hope that I at least gave you a sense of it and that you will read more. All that is left therefore is to thank the organisers, the experts, too many to name, the wonderful drafting committee,

and especially our consultant Lara Fergus who worked tirelessly to help us pull of this together.

In closing let me say this, as we negotiate and debate over these two weeks, let us remember that girls and women are not statistics or words on documents, we are over half of the world's population and we are at risk simply because we are women – this is unacceptable. Violence against women and girls is preventable, and the time to act is not in ten years, it is now.