

**“Halt Gender Violence – Second annual New York  
Community Observance of International Women’s Day”  
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It is my honour to participate with you in this commemoration of International Women's Day. I express my appreciation to the Hunger Project and all their partners for taking this important initiative and warmly thank St Bartholomews for hosting the event.

Halting the scourge of persistent violence against women by men is one of the most serious and urgent challenges of our time - critical not only for the women and girls of the world but for the future development of humankind.

The violence of men against women and girls is a truly global phenomenon - occurring in many different settings and cutting across all cultures, regions and countries. It takes on many different manifestations and is constantly evolving in new forms. Such violence is perpetrated by family members, by strangers, and by the State or its agents. It occurs in both the public and private spheres, and in peacetime as well as in conflict and its aftermath.

Male violence against women is not confined to any particular group of women - on the contrary, women of all ages, classes, and income groups are subjected to violence by men. The way in which violence is experienced by women and girls around the world may, however, be significantly influenced by age, class, disability, ethnicity, religion and economic status.

Although global statistics are inadequate, a recent in-depth study by the UN indicates that, on average, at least one in three women is subject to some form of violence at some time in her life. These numbers are a grim reminder of the pervasiveness of the

violation of women's human rights and the inadequacy of the responses in all parts of the world.

The UN's in-depth study illustrates very clearly that the violence of men against women and girls is an affront against humanity. It has far-reaching consequences - endangering the lives of women and girls, harming their families and communities, and damaging the very fabric of societies.

The human development consequences of violence against women and girls go far beyond the devastating human costs for women, girls and their families. Persistent violence seriously undermines the potential of women and girls to be involved in and contribute actively to human development, as well as their possibility for benefiting equitably.

Violence against women and girls undercuts the potential for achieving equality, development and peace and security - the critical goals established over the past 60 years by the international community, and reaffirmed by world leaders in 2000 and 2005. Unless explicit attention is given to identifying and addressing violence against women, the serious health, social, and economic consequences will continue to hinder progress in all areas of human development, something the world can ill afford.

How can this pandemic be halted? The horrific statistics at all levels and the dramatic individual stories and pictures of violence against women and girls, do not lend themselves easily to optimism and hope. The gaps and challenges in preventing violence, protecting the rights of women and girls and providing an effective response are serious ones. And yet recent work, including the indepth study of the United Nations, has indicated that there are drivers of change which we must clearly identify and systematically and effectively utilize to create a groundswell of awareness and action for change.

One of the most critical drivers of change is the work of civil society. For decades, grassroots women's organizations and women's rights movements have tirelessly worked to bring the issue of violence against women out of the private domain into public attention and the arena of State accountability. The attention accorded to violence against women today at all levels is in large part due to the work of these groups, networks and movements. The fantastic mobilization of civil society, for example around the 16 Days of Activism against Violence, is a clear manifestation of the passion, creativity, and determination of women around the world to bring violence against women and girls out of the "shadows" and into the spotlight of public scrutiny.

A further positive lever for change is the fact that we do have today a comprehensive international legal and policy framework on violence against women. The required standards for action by States to meet their commitments and obligations are well established. Research and statistics have shown clearly, however, that States have failed in their responsibility to implement the framework at national level. The fact that the in-depth study makes this clear is an important step forward.

The UN in-depth study makes a positive contribution in illustrating the way forward by highlighting critical measures for achieving measureable progress. The title of the study "From words to action" indicates that the aim is to result in concrete action by all stakeholders.

Let me briefly outline what I believe are some of the critical contributions of the study. Firstly, it establishes irrevocably that male violence against women and girls is a violation of their human rights. The study also clearly points to the obligations of States under the legal framework, to protect women and girls from violence, to hold perpetrators accountable, and to provide justice and remedies to victims.

The study seeks to strengthen political will to move forward and to increase the accountability of those responsible for action – particularly States. 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.

The process of preparation of the in-depth study also provided some opportunities for change. The consultative 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.

Many examples of good and promising practices in addressing violence against women and girls have been collected. We do have today a good sense of what is needed to prevent violence, offer protection and provide relief to victims. This ever-expanding pool of promising practices in, for example, legislation, services, and prevention efforts, enhances our ability to learn from each other, to scale up promising interventions, and to replicate and adapt well-proven efforts. Let me give you some examples of the types of interventions the United Nations study highlights.

Comprehensive laws have broadened the definition of violence and now offer protection against more forms of violence. Though there are often inadequacies in the scope and coverage of legislation, some 89 States have legislative provisions that specifically address domestic violence. Of these, 60 have a domestic violence law. Marital rape can now be prosecuted in at least 104 States. About 90 States have legislation on sexual harassment and 93 States have legislation on trafficking of human beings.

Services available to victims increasingly address the physical, emotional and psychological effects of violence. The establishment of “one stop centers” has been successful in bringing together medical, counseling, and legal services under one roof. Telephone hotlines that provide access to information are now standard in many

countries, as are shelters that assist women to escape violent situations. In a number of countries, specialized courts and police units, and systematic and mandatory training of law enforcement officials, have established clear and predictable standards and increased efficiency in the management of cases, in a way that reduces the burden on victims and improves case outcomes.

There is also a growing focus on prevention of violence - changing attitudes and challenging stereotypes in society and assisting communities that seek to end the silence surrounding violence against women. There are examples of comprehensive nation-wide campaigns from many countries using a variety of means, such as theatre, vigils, demonstrations, radio, television and the internet. The courageous testimonies of survivors have also been documented and publicized to raise awareness, educate the community and empower other victims.

A number of other important shifts in the work on combating violence against women and girls provide new impetus for our efforts to eliminate such violence. Of particular significance is the fact that we are more accurately naming” the problem, i.e. more clearly pointing to the fact that we are dealing with male violence against women.

It is, however, also important to acknowledge that increasing numbers of men have become engaged in combating violence against women and girls, as individuals and in networks or groups. This is critical as addressing violence against women is very much about transforming relations between women and men. And strong partnerships between women and men on combating violence against women are essential.

As Ted Bunch expresses so eloquently: all men, even the "good" men, benefit from the existing patriarchal system and the discrimination and inequality that women face, whether they like it or not, and whether they are willing to acknowledge it or not. All men must therefore be involved in dismantling the system. It is not enough for the "good" men to be able to declare that they do not commit violence against women and girls themselves; they must also be willing to take active steps to ensure that no other

men commit such violence. Men holding positions of power and influence have a particular responsibility to become actively engaged.

The increased focus on the gains and benefits to men of gender equality, and the constructive work on developing alternative masculinities which can free men from the constraints of patriarchy, are also important in the work on addressing violence against women.

The recognition that violence against women and girls is rooted in inequality and discrimination is critical for finding adequate solutions. Efforts to eliminate violence must clearly focus on eliminating the discrimination on which it is based.

The acknowledgement that the widespread impunity for violence against women, at so many levels, is completely unacceptable is also a positive step. Impunity is a key element in perpetrating violence. When States do not hold perpetrators accountable, the culture of impunity which develops leads to a vicious cycle of reinforced inequality, normalization of violence, and denial of justice. Effectively addressing impunity requires concerted efforts to change the underlying values, attitudes and prejudices that foster inequality, discrimination and violence.

To move forward we must recognize the long way we have come, the tremendous commitments, the struggles and the many achievements made. We need to commemorate and celebrate our victories. The more we achieve, the more we know we can accomplish. We must find ways to creatively build on the significant gains made, to scale up efforts and ensure sustained positive impact on the lives of women and girls.

A major challenge we face is sustaining the momentum generated. It is positive to note that, following the launch of the in-depth study and the adoption of the General Assembly resolution with clear recommendations for action, many stakeholders around the world began a concerted focus on implementation and follow-up. Last week the UN Commission on the Status of Women discussed the question of violence against women

and the follow up to the UN study. The Commission also addressed, as a priority issue, violence against girls. This morning at the UN commemoration of International Women's Day, the Secretary-General called for an annual event on violence against women in the General Assembly and called on the Security Council to establish a mechanism to address violence against women and girls in conflict situations.

Many individual women and girls suffering violence are today still left without recourse and without any means to change their situations in positive ways. We, on the other hand, have the power to do something. Every woman and man can and must make a commitment to work to eliminate violence against women and girls. We can no longer accept that violence against women and girls is the most common crime in the world; and the least punished crime. There are no grounds for tolerance of such violence and no tolerable excuses. Violence against women is always a violation of human rights; it is always a crime; and it is always unacceptable. As one of the speakers at the commemoration in the UN this morning urged: We must all help to "tell the story". The whispering must end; there must be an outcry. Enough is enough. The time to end violence against women and girls is now.

Each one of us here tonight *can* make a difference.

Thank you.