

53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women

**Launch of the Secretary-General's
database on violence against women**

**5 March 2009, 1:15 to 2:30 pm
Conference room 2, United Nations Headquarters**

**Statement by Carolyn Hannan
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Chairperson,
Mme Deputy Secretary-General,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to participate in the launch of the Secretary-General's database on violence against women.

The Deputy Secretary-General has drawn attention to the mandate provided by the General Assembly for the establishment of the database. Over the past two years, the Women's Rights Section in the Division for the Advancement of Women has worked to conceptualize and develop the database.

The Division has benefited from the technical and substantive advice of many colleagues in different offices of the Secretariat and the United Nations system, and I extend my appreciation to all those who have assisted in this process. In preparing the database, the Division has examined existing databases, reviewed measures taken by Member States, and held extensive discussions on the kind of information that policy-makers, researchers, activists and other stakeholders would wish to have access to in order to strengthen and accelerate their own efforts.

In my comments, I will cover two main aspects. I will first speak about the purpose and nature of the database and its capabilities, and then provide an overview of the current content of the database, and the ways in which we hope the database will develop and become more comprehensive over time.

- This publicly accessible and searchable database is expected to:
- Ensure easy access to comprehensive and up-to-date information on all forms of violence against women, as well as actions taken to address such violence;
 - Encourage further collection, use and dissemination of data on violence against women, as well as analysis of such data;

- Increase opportunities for exchange of experiences and promising practices in addressing violence against women;
- Improve tracking of trends in addressing violence against women; and
- Strengthen the knowledge base for effective policy responses to prevent and address violence against women.

We also hope that the database will provide a strong link to the Secretary-General's "*UNiTE to end violence against women*" campaign.

Towards this end, the database provides information on all aspects of Member States' work to address violence against women, including their:

- Legal framework;
- Policies, strategies and programmes;
- Institutional mechanisms;
- Preventive measures;
- Training;
- Research and statistical data; and
- Other measures undertaken, such as engagement in international/regional initiatives, and the creation of specialized police, prosecutors, and courts.

The database also contains information on the *evaluation* of measures undertaken, and examples of *good or promising practices*.

In the coming weeks, the website of the database will become navigable in all six official languages of the United Nations. By enabling the user to choose among the six official languages, we hope to increase the accessibility of information on violence against women and the steps that Member States have taken to counteract it to anyone interested in these measures. I should note, however, that the information the database contains – namely the search results, descriptions of measures undertaken by Member States, and full text of relevant documents – will be available in English and/or the language in which it was provided to the Secretariat.

Let me now discuss the four main ways in which users may obtain information from the database. You will be able to follow these functions on the screen, where we will exemplify the different search methods.

The most comprehensive and sophisticated method of searching the database is its advanced search function. Using this function, the user may filter the information contained in the database by type of measure (for example legislation); form of violence (for example domestic violence); country and/or region (for example Africa); and the year in which the measure was undertaken. The user is further able to refine the search by the use of "keywords" (such as "protection orders"). In addition, the user is able to request to view *only* those results that have been evaluated; *only* those results identified as good practices; and/or *only* those results that are identified as having been undertaken in relation to the Secretary-General's UNiTE campaign. As Member States undertake

activities in support of the Secretary-General's "UNiTE to End Violence Against Women" Campaign, this last feature of the database will also grow.

The second option, particularly relevant for those users who are interested in a particular *country*, is the use of the relevant country page. The database contains a country page for each Member State of the United Nations, which lists all measures undertaken by that particular country. (An example of a country page with information available in two languages is Kyrgyzstan).

A third option, for those users who would like to know what measures have been identified as good practices, is to view the good practices page of the database. Currently, this page contains a list of measures that have been identified as promising practices in the Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women in 2006. Over time, the number of measures identified as good or promising practices will be updated and expanded.

Finally, those users who would like to undertake their own, unguided search of the database may do so by entering a search query into the search box in the top right-hand corner of the website. This last option is, however, the least reliable method of searching the database.

I will now give you an overview of the current content of the database.

The primary source for the information included in the database is the responses of Member States to the comprehensive questionnaire on violence against women that was sent to all Permanent Missions in September 2008, with a request to submit their responses by 4 January 2009.

At the commencement of the Commission on 2 March, 61 Member States had responded to the questionnaire, and I express our deep appreciation to them for the detailed and comprehensive information provided. A number of Member States have subsequently informed us that they are in the process of preparing detailed information for the database. As of today, 34 responses received up until 15 January have been entered into the database. The remaining responses will be entered in the near future.

You will also currently find in the database some information about legislative measures undertaken by States that have not yet submitted their responses to the questionnaire. This information was collected during the preparatory process for the Secretary General's study, and is drawn from the following sources of information: States Parties' reports to human rights treaty bodies – in regard to legislation on violence against women; and information provided by Member States for reports of the Secretary-General in follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as in statements made at the United Nations, for example during the general debates in the Commission on the Status of Women or the General Assembly. Some information available through relevant United Nations entities has also been included.

Let me now indicate briefly the ways we hope the database will develop and become more comprehensive over time.

Firstly, I must stress that the database and the information it contains is, and will continue to be, only as up-to-date and accurate as the information received by the Division. The database should not be seen to be indicative of the entire body of work that is being undertaken by Member States to address violence against women, but rather as a tool for sharing the information that Member States have made available – through their responses to the questionnaire, in reports to treaty bodies, in statements at the United Nations, or as inputs to Secretary-General's reports.

I thank all Member States who responded to the questionnaire on, or close to, the deadline, and reassure those who have responded later, that we will endeavour to input their information as soon as possible. I also take this opportunity to call upon those Member States who have not yet responded to the questionnaire, to do so at their earliest convenience, and to call upon those Member States who have responded to the questionnaire, to continue to provide us with new and additional information and documents as these become available.

We firmly believe that this database and the information that it contains will provide an innovative and useful tool for all those working to address violence against women throughout the world. It provides unprecedented access to the laws, policies, programmes and statistics of Member States across the globe, in their ongoing efforts to eliminate this fundamental violation of women's human rights.

We trust that a broad range of stakeholders – government officials and decision-makers, parliamentarians, representatives of national Human Rights Institutes, representatives of civil society, our colleagues in the United Nations system, researchers and academics – will find the database useful and will disseminate information to all relevant stakeholders on its existence and usefulness.

Before concluding, let me express our appreciation to those United Nations country offices that have offered their support and actively assisted Member States in the preparation of responses to the questionnaire.

The request for the creation of this database by the General Assembly is a tribute to the political will of all United Nations Member States to address violence against women and the increased awareness of the value of sharing of experiences and learning from one another, in order to move forward together to eliminate this scourge.

I invite Member States and other stakeholders to provide any feedback you may have to the Division, once you have had the opportunity to explore the database.

Thank you.