

**Opening Remarks by Carolyn Hannan
Director, Division for the Advancement of Women**

**Fourth International Helvi Sipilä Seminar
Organized by the Finnish UNIFEM Committee**

United Nations Headquarters, 4 March 2009

Madame Moderator,
Distinguished participants,

I am honoured to make opening remarks at this Fourth International Helvi Sipilä Seminar. I thank the Finnish Federation of University Women/International Federation of University Women and the Finnish UNIFEM Committee for their efforts in organizing this seminar, and for the continued support to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women through this initiative.

Throughout her life in her work in many different contexts, Minister Helvi Sipilä kept a strong focus on the human rights of women and girls, including the right to be free from the fear of violence. From her extensive efforts to promote gender equality and empowerment of women in the United Nations and in many other fora, Minister Sipilä was keenly aware of the vulnerability of women and girls to different forms of violence and the need for concerted efforts, particularly in the areas of policy development and legislation, to eradicate violence against women in all its forms in both the public and private spheres.

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The theme of this seminar – the eradication of violence against women - is critical for the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women. Violence against women remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations of our time. It has far-reaching consequences - endangering the lives of women and girls, harming their families and communities, and damaging the very fabric of societies. Halting the scourge of persistent violence against women is one of the most serious and urgent challenges of our time - critical not only for women and girls themselves but for the future development of humankind. 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 here in the United Nations in 2000 and 2005.

There is a growing global momentum to address violence against women and unprecedented action is being taken. A number of critical events in recent years have put the eradication of violence against women firmly on the agenda of the United Nations. In October 2006, the Secretary-General of the United Nations launched his in-depth study on violence against women. The study highlighted the persistence and unacceptability of all forms of violence against women; and identified concrete ways and means to ensure a more sustained and effective response to violence against women, by all stakeholders.

The General Assembly responded to the Study with a comprehensive and action-oriented resolution. It called on all stakeholders to intensify their efforts to eliminate violence against women. It requested the Secretary-General to establish a database, with information

provided by States, on the extent, nature and consequences of all forms of violence against women, as well as on the impact and effectiveness of policies and programmes for combating such violence. Tomorrow at lunchtime in CR2, the Deputy Secretary-General will launch this database.

The database has been developed by the Division for the Advancement of Women and will be the first consolidated source of information on measures undertaken by Member States to address violence against women, as well as on available research and statistical data. It will contain information on Member States' legal frameworks; policies, programmes and strategies; institutional mechanisms; services for victims/survivors; and preventive measures and training. The primary source of information for the database is the responses to the questionnaire on violence against women sent to all Member States in September 2008. The database will encourage exchange on initiatives and ideas, and the transfer of promising practices. It will facilitate learning, provide inspiration for new approaches, and show where progress is being made and where work remains to be done.

An inventory on activities undertaken by United Nations entities to end violence against women is also updated maintained by the Division for the Advancement of Women and updated twice yearly. Let me also take the opportunity to inform you that the Division publishes and disseminated widely an electronic newsletter "*Words to Action*" on violence against women, which contains information on resources and events undertaken by Member States and United Nations to address violence against women, as well as substantive analyses of pertinent topics. The feature article in issue # 2 of the newsletter examines, for example, developments over time in legislation on violence against women.

Last year at the Commission on the Status of Women, the Secretary-General launched a multi-year global campaign: "*UNiTE to end violence against women*" (2008-2015). The Secretary-General has called on all stakeholders to join him on this important mission – to eradicate violence against women.

Running from 2008-2015 - to coincide with the target-date for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - the campaign will focus on three key areas- global advocacy, strengthened efforts and partnerships at all levels, and United Nations leadership by example. The link to the MDGs reflects the fact that violence against women constrains their active involvement in development efforts and is a serious obstacle to the achievement of all internationally agreed development goals.

The campaign aims to mobilize public opinion to ensure that policy makers at the highest level work to eradicate violence against women. The Secretary-General is calling on world leaders to lead national campaigns to end violence against women. The growing commitment of men to prevent and combat violence against women will be leveraged and the campaign will encourage the active involvement of men and boys.

The campaign is expected to engage all parts of the UN system, as well as Member States, other international and regional organizations and NGOs, the private sector and media. Many different groups of stakeholders will be involved in the campaign in different ways. To give one practical example, a New York theatre group decided to produce a play focused on violence against women as a direct contribution to the campaign. This very moving play, MIKA, will be performed tomorrow evening in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium and followed by a panel on the role of theatre groups and other creative artists in

eradication violence against women. Other groups, such as academics, are considering how they can contribute.

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Women's groups and networks played a particularly critical role in putting the issue of violence against women on the UN agenda. For this reason, the Secretary-General noted that such groups and networks were key partners in his campaign. It is critical that such engagement with the United Nations on the issue of violence against women continues and is strengthened.

However, it is also critical to engage men and boys since addressing violence against women is very much about transforming relations between women and men. Strong partnerships between women and men on combating violence against women are essential. Innovative efforts have been made to achieve greater involvement of men and increasing numbers of men have become engaged in combating violence against women and girls, as individuals and in networks or groups. Men holding positions of power and influence have a particular responsibility to become actively engaged.

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Despite the increased focus on violence against women in recent years, many women and girls exposed to violence are today still left without support and means of redress, and without any means to change their situations in positive ways. Violence against women and girls has been termed the most common and least punished crime in the world. It must become globally accepted that violence against women is always a violation of human rights; it is always a crime; and it is always unacceptable. Further concerted efforts are needed to ensure that it is clear there are no grounds for tolerance of such violence and no tolerable excuses, and that the time to end violence against women and girls is now.

Thank you.