

**SMMUN VIII  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY PLENARY**

**ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

“Violence against women is the most pervasive violation of human rights, occurring every day in every country and every region, regardless of income or level of development.”<sup>1</sup>

“There must be no impunity for gender-based violence. Let me be clear. What we are talking about is not a side issue. It is not a special interest group of concern to only a few. What we are talking about are not only women’s rights but also the human rights of over one half of this globe’s population...Violence against women concerns not only women, but above all the rest of us.”<sup>2</sup>

**Introduction**

The unequal and often demeaning treatment of women in all parts of the world is, unfortunately, one of the most profound commonalities between all societies. Even though girls and women comprise half of the world’s population, they are systematically excluded from most centers of power and positions of authority and decision-making, whether in the government, business world, academic community, or even many non-governmental organizations (NGO’s). With the creation and establishment of this unequal infrastructure, it should come as no surprise that violence against women persists in all its pernicious forms. The United Nations System has been at the forefront of many different international campaigns and initiatives to improve the status and treatment of women and the UN continues to play a vital role in spurring governments and civil society actors to both outlaw and eliminate violence against women. Valuable progress has been made in many countries in terms of new or strengthened laws punishing all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence and even marital rape – crimes that still go unpunished in far too many societies, – but a great deal remains to be done to change the minds of men as well as to prescribe their behavior. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), working in concert with other relevant international agencies, governments, and interested civil society stakeholders, must build upon the vital work that has already been finished and help the world community move from eliminating violence against women to preventing any future violence against women. Eliminating violence against women is an integral component of all international efforts to satisfy the Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s) and to create sustainable and equitable societies.

---

<sup>1</sup> Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) “Report of the United Nations Development Fund for Women on the elimination of violence against women” E/CN.6/2006/10-E/CN.4/2006/60 December 20, 2005 p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Vieira de Mello, Sergio, “Violence Against Women – What Next?” Symposium sponsored by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the NGO Committee on the Status of Women Geneva, Switzerland April 8, 2003.

## **Scale of the problem**

The gravitas of the global dimensions of the endemic problems of violence against women can never be fully expressed through statistics but statistics do form a vital component of informing legislators and related decision-makers about the scale of the problem. According to Amnesty International, at least one third of all women have been beaten, forced into having sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetimes. Amnesty also cites widely reported data that a woman is beaten every 15 seconds in the United States, that 36,000 Russian women are beaten every day by spouses or partners, and that in Zambia 5 women a week are murdered by their spouses or partners.<sup>3</sup> These horrific statistics only begin to tell the myriad tales of intense, and often chronic, human suffering and the immense social costs that all this suffering imposes. As is confirmed by these statistics, the brutality that far too many women endure on a regular, and sometimes daily, basis is not restricted to any particular region of the world, any ethnicity, race, religion, or social class. One enormously powerful reason for why violence against women continues to be so pervasive throughout the world is that huge numbers of cases, in some societies an estimated half of all cases, of violence against women are never reported to anyone, much less than the authorities. Amnesty International cites 2002 statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO) that only 3 percent of all rapes are reported to authorities in Chile.<sup>4</sup> Societies throughout the world need to improve their legislative, police and human rights, and social institutions mechanisms to effectively prohibit, punish, and ultimately prevent violence against women.

## **Madame President, Madame Speaker: We need better laws**

Women are making significant and sustained impacts on the political arenas of their respective societies and around the world. In Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf recently became the first female president in Africa and in January 2007, Nancy Pelosi became the first female Speaker of the House in the United States Congress. Female politicians are also exercising greater power in a number of other countries around the world. The hope is that female politicians will be more willing to confront issues of violence against women than some of their male counterparts; thus far, the logic behind this thinking seems to be borne out by some recent legislative initiatives. Female politicians are far more likely to have direct personal experience or to know a female friend or relative who has suffered violence and abuse and they may be more motivated to use the instruments of the state, including the legislature, to affect social change. “Laws are the building blocks, but the overall project of gender equality is linked to the establishment of the rule of law. And that requires a legislature that understands the importance of gender equality for society and for eliminating violence. For this reason, countries such as Argentina, Austria, Ghana, India, Italy, Peru, Senegal and Timor-Leste have experimented with quotas for women’s representation and the CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of

---

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, “Making Violence Against Women Count: Facts and Figures – a Summary” May 3, 2004. Found at: <http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGACTION770342004>

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, “Making Violence Against Women Count: Facts and Figures – a Summary”

all Forms of Discrimination Against Women] Committee urges governments to reach a minimum of 30 percent representation by women.”<sup>5</sup> Many legislatures are currently enacting new or stronger measures to prevent and punish violence against women as well as to provide protection, health services, and counseling for the victims of violence against women but these initiatives are far from universal.

Momentum for outlawing violence against women is certainly accelerating. At least 45 countries have enacted specific legislation against domestic violence, more than 50 countries currently recognize marital rape as a crime, and legislatures are directing more resources towards services for treating the victims of violence against women. Unfortunately, however, some of these laws still reflect patriarchal thinking, thus lessening much of their preventive and punitive capacity. “Rape laws, for example, sometimes provide loopholes for perpetrators by dropping charges if the rapist marries his victim as is the case in Cameroon, Ethiopia, and Romania. Other countries may require a witness to a rape or domestic violence before a case can be brought to court, even though both types of attack rarely occur in public.”<sup>6</sup> In some countries, including remote areas of Pakistan, women who are raped are supposed to commit suicide or be killed by their male relatives to spare their families the shame that the family will suffer as a result of the woman being raped. In such cases, even when governments make public statements condemning such practices, they typically do not devote needed resources, in manpower, money, and pressure, to actually end these practices. Eliminating these egregious loopholes, ending honor killings, and drafting new laws are essential first steps for many countries. Enforcement of existing laws, and of laws that are currently being drafted or will be drafted in the future, is absolutely fundamental for all societies.

Domestic violence is another frighteningly common form of violence against women. Husbands, boyfriends, and male relatives including fathers, brothers, and uncles, inflict serious injuries on wives, girlfriends, daughters, sisters, and nieces on a daily basis. Many governments have enacted laws to punish domestic violence but the laws are nowhere near uniform in their formats, language, or punishments. In some countries, women must show clear physical evidence of abuse and violence, such as bruises, cuts, or broken bones, several weeks after the abuse occurred in order to actually press charges against their abusers. Many women never report domestic abuse for fear of reprisal, including murder, by their abusers as well as the fact that police officers and judges still routinely discount the accounts of the victims. Far too many women also cannot afford legal counsel to seek necessary remedies for the abuse that they have suffered.

The pervasive sexual component of many forms of violence against women is excruciatingly evident when confronting the problems of trafficking in women and girls, forced prostitution, and sexual slavery. Women and girls are often either recruited or kidnapped and forced into prostitution or situations of sexual slavery. These problems are alarmingly all too common throughout the world but they are most perniciously frequent when the women and girls come from impoverished backgrounds. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that 35% of all women and girls trafficked in or

---

<sup>5</sup> UNIFEM, “Not a minute more: Ending Violence Against Women” New York 2003 p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> UNIFEM, “Not a minute more: Ending Violence Against Women” p. 43.

from the country of Laos were sold into situations of forced prostitution, the most common fate of all the Laotian women and girls caught up in this horrific trade.<sup>7</sup> Trafficking in women and girls is especially prevalent in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe with huge numbers of these girls and women being sold into forced prostitution and sexual slavery in Western Europe, the United States, and Canada. UNIFEM, UNODC, Interpol, concerned governments, NGO's, and relevant civil society representatives are all increasing their cooperative efforts to combat this global affront to human dignity.

### **Female genital mutilation**

One particular form of violence against women that has received much greater scrutiny in the past 10 years is the ritual cutting of a girl's or woman's genitalia, often known as female genital mutilation (FGM). Girls and women in parts of Africa and the Middle East are most frequently subjected to this practice which some parents "argue that it helps prevent promiscuous behavior in their daughters" because it removes most of the sensitivity in women's sexual organs.<sup>8</sup> Many people who defend the practice also argue that it is sanctioned by their cultural traditions and religious beliefs but at a recent conference in Cairo on FGM, Muslim scholars from around the world condemned the practice and argued that it is not sanctioned by Islam. FGM has become a salient political issue in the West in recent years as well because a number of women have sought political asylum in Canada, Europe, and the United States to avoid being subjected to FGM. Western governments have mostly denied asylum based upon FGM claims but these same governments and especially Western NGO's have increased their pressure on certain African and Middle Eastern governments to end this practice.

### **Training the police to listen to the victims**

For the hundreds of millions of women who have been abused or suffered from violence, their situations are all too frequently made much worse by police and security officials who are disbelieving, patronizing, and even hostile to women who report acts of violence. Women frequently state that when they report crimes and violence committed against them, police officers, especially not exclusively male police officers, often evince disbelief and/or do not take their concerns seriously. "In country after country, women report that the police are also insensitive and may fail to adequately investigate gender-based crimes. Some women have reported that when they went to the police to report a rape, male officers would make light of it, even asking whether they enjoyed the experience."<sup>9</sup> One truly reprehensible reason for the lack of concern shown by many police and security forces is that members of the police and security forces routinely commit acts of violence, including sexual assault and rape, against women. Recently, in the United Kingdom, a jury had to deliberate in the case of 2 British police officers accused of handcuffing and raping a woman in the back of their patrol car; even more

---

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.unodc.org/laopdr/agreement\\_bolster\\_fight.html](http://www.unodc.org/laopdr/agreement_bolster_fight.html)

<sup>8</sup> *BBC News* "Call to end female circumcision" November 24, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> UNIFEM, "Not a minute more: Ending Violence Against Women" p. 46.

disquieting was the fact that one of the officers had to face another charge of sexual assault in a police vehicle from a separate incident.<sup>10</sup> UN peacekeeping soldiers have committed acts of violence, especially sexual violence, against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as well as other parts of the world. To eliminate violence against women, governments and interested civil society stakeholders must improve the human rights training of police and security officers and crimes committed by police and security officers must be prosecuted and punished no less stringently than crimes committed by ordinary citizens.

### **It takes a village**

Effective enforcement of the laws is primarily the duty of states but civil society groups must be constantly and directly involved in this enforcement and implementation if violence against women is going to be eliminated. According to UNIFEM, “implementation also requires monitoring, a task that is all too often left to women’s machineries, which tend to be under-funded and lack influence. NGO’s monitoring role is important for accountability, but they lack resources for national coverage and many would welcome associations with mainstream human rights organizations that have a broader public outreach and political influence.”<sup>11</sup> NGO’s are often crucial to reminding governments of their legal and social obligations as well as ensuring that related civil society actors are more aware of the severity of problems such as violence against women. While vital progress has been made in many countries in regards to reporting and punishing domestic violence, violence, including sexual violence, against women in the workplace is still “shockingly high” in countries such as Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> Domestic NGO’s have provided invaluable assistance by compiling statistics, documenting cases, organizing demonstrations and marches, creating shelters, and contacting politicians and journalists as well as by forging international partnerships with human rights NGO’s and UNIFEM.

### **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**

The most important international treaty that addresses the myriad causes and effects of violence against women is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). As of the beginning of 2007, at least 185 countries had ratified the convention but the United States of America remained a key outlier to the goal of forging a true international consensus because the US Senate has refused to ratify the treaty for the past 26 years since it was signed during the Carter Administration. To monitor compliance with CEDAW, the assembled delegates also created the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. A crucial step in making international efforts at eliminating violence against women truly universal would be to increase international, national, and local efforts to have all countries ratify and implement the convention. In defense of the United States, American lawmakers have passed and implemented crucial legislation aimed at eliminating violence against

---

<sup>10</sup> *BBC News* “Jury considers police rape case” December 9, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> UNIFEM, “Not a minute more: Ending Violence Against Women” p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> *BBC News* “Nigeria ‘ignoring’ beaten women” May 31, 2005.

women and countries and NGO's around the world continue to look to American women and related civil society representatives and stakeholders to provide important global leadership on this issue. American leadership in ending violence against women would be strengthened even further through Senate ratification of the convention.

### **The UN System and the elimination of violence against women**

Within the UN System, multiple committees and Specialized Agencies are charged with the fundamental task of working with governments, NGO's, and related civil society stakeholders to eliminate violence against women. UNIFEM partners closely with the Division of the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Human Rights Council, the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and even the Security Council and the International Criminal Court (ICC). In the Rome Statute creating the ICC, rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, and other comparable forms of sexual violence carried out on a mass scale are all defined as "crimes against humanity" (Article 7) and can also be designated as "war crimes" (Article 8). While the establishment of the ICC has not ended these horrible crimes and acts of violence against women, it definitely raises the stakes for those committing these acts of brutality and violence against women, including members of the widely reviled Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of northern Uganda and may also be used in future trials of those found to have terrorized the civilian populations of the Darfur region of western Sudan. In 2008, the Security Council passed resolution 1820 (S/RES/1820) which "explicitly instructs military and other peacekeepers to refine methods of preventing sexual violence, through security sector measures but also through other efforts to prevent impunity."<sup>13</sup>

Women and children comprise the vast majority of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP's) worldwide and violence against these extremely vulnerable populations must be addressed comprehensively and systematically. Governments can improve the situation of these vulnerable women by training their security forces, including those that they volunteer for UN peacekeeping missions, to be respectful of the human rights of all people and to be sensitive to the particular concerns and safety issues that women face. In 2002, "a study by the UNHCR and a UK charity... found that some aid agency employees were exchanging food and other supplies for sex."<sup>14</sup> Preventing any further incidents of sexual abuse and exploitation of refugees and IDP's is imperative for successful UN peacekeeping, relief, and repatriation efforts.

In 1995, the General Assembly, in resolution 50/166 (A/RES/50/166) established the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women with UNIFEM as the administrator for the fund. The Trust Fund has doubled in size in terms of the total amount of resources that it controls but the demand for its resources through the grants that it funds continues to far exceed the resources in the fund. Over the 10-year period that the Trust Fund has been disbursing grant monies, it

---

<sup>13</sup> UNIFEM and European Union (EU), "European Union and United Nations to Push for Action to Effectively Address Violence Against Women" October 10, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> *BBC News* "Sex-for-aid under UN spotlight" March 8, 2002.

has doled out approximately \$13 million to fund over 200 projects in countries around the world, including recent initiatives in Bhutan, Cambodia, the Dominican Republic, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Tajikistan.<sup>15</sup> The Trust Fund has recently increased its funding of projects that address the increasing links between violence against women and HIV/AIDS and UNIFEM partners extensively with many other UN agencies, including UNAIDS, UNHCR, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the International Labour Organization (ILO), to evaluate and award these grants. The government of Finland has made consistent sustaining contributions to the Trust Fund and in 2005, the United States government made its first contributions to the fund as did the major multi-national corporation (MNC) Johnson & Johnson. One essential step in eliminating violence against women will definitely include increased funding of the Trust Fund by governments, corporations, NGO's, including UNIFEM National Committees, and related civil society stakeholders.

## **Conclusion**

Ending violence against women is a moral and practical imperative for the entire world. Ensuring that women and girls are able to participate fully in the cultural, economic, political, and social components of their societies requires a constant and sustained commitment to recognizing the inherent dignity of all people and a further commitment on the part of governments to enact and enforce effective laws and policies. Simply put, achieving gender equality, ending poverty, and creating sustainable societies based upon mutual respect and a commitment to justice are not possible as long as women and girls confront the terrifying twin prospects of violence directed against them and indifference regarding their suffering.

## **Guiding Questions:**

What legislative initiatives has your government undertaken to prevent and eliminate violence against women? Has your government outlawed domestic violence and marital rape? Has your government effectively prosecuted members of the police and security forces who have been charged with committing violence, including sexual violence, against women?

What actions has your government taken to end trafficking in women and girls, as well as forced prostitution and sexual slavery? Has your government received international assistance to carry out its efforts to end violence against women? What about NGO's and related civil society stakeholders?

---

<sup>15</sup> <sup>15</sup> Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

“Report of the United Nations Development Fund for Women on the elimination of violence against women” E/CN.6/2006/10-E/CN.4/2006/60 December 20, 2005 p. 3.