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PRESS STATEMENT TO COMMEMORATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY-2008

“The Special Fund to Eliminate Violence Against Women is about investing in women and girls in Afghanistan”

“There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable,” the Secretary-General at the opening in New York of the latest session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

8 March 2008: To observe the International Women's Day, Ministry of Women's Affairs, UN, donors and other partners are launching the Special Fund for Eliminating Violence Against Women (EVAW) through a Press Conference on Saturday, 8 March 2008 at the Resource Centre for Women in Politics at 11:45 a.m.

As stated by the Special Rapporteur on VAW in her last visit to Afghanistan, “violence against women remains dramatic in its intensity and pervasiveness”. Some of the worst forms of violence committed against women in Afghanistan include; forced and early marriage, domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, trafficking of women and children, and honor killings. An overall lack of awareness on women's rights as well as limited participation in the social, economic and political spheres affects Afghan women's ability to protect themselves from violence.

The Special Fund for ending VAW in Afghanistan was established in 2007 by UN agencies, national and international organizations providing support to women victims of violence. The main objective of the fund is to strengthen and expand national capacity for the prevention of sexual and gender based violence; protection of women at risk and victims of violence in a coordinated and comprehensive manner. The fund is managed with the assistance of an Advisory Board that has 11 members including the Ministry of Women Affairs and Ministry of Education. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Department for International Development - UK, and governments of Italy, Denmark and Norway have committed \$3 million to the Special fund.

The Special fund will coordinate and streamline efforts as well as highlight the commitment of donors towards addressing sexual and gender based violence. The Fund will provide grants for interlinked activities of governmental and non-governmental institutions. Furthermore, it will develop a coordinating, reporting and data collection mechanism to promote inter-linkages between different programs for the elimination of violence against women.

The Fund was introduced widely by UN agencies through a series of orientation sessions in Kabul and the provinces. The purpose of the Fund, eligibility criteria and proposal format

were explained in the sessions. The first call for proposals was shared through the media and other sources in October 2007 and more than 84 proposals were submitted with extensive geographic coverage. Proposals submitted by the government ministries had a nationwide approach. The Technical Review Committee short-listed the proposals received from Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Parwan, Kapisa, Panjsher, Farah, Badghis, Nangarhar, Maidan Wardak, Juzjan, Kandahar and Ghazni provinces. The approved projects will focus on four specific areas, Safe houses/shelters; Legal Aid/Legal awareness in line with the National Justice Program; Psychosocial Aid; and Awareness-raising.

The venue for the press conference i.e. Resource Center for Women in Politics was established in 2007. The Centre provides space, capacity building, and technical assistance to women in politics, government, elected officials at the national and provincial levels, and civil society members. This initiative helps to reinforce the need for a cohesive and strategic approach from all partners including the international community and donors to prioritize EAW in Afghanistan.

For Further information, please contact:
Evawfund.afghanistan@unifem.org