

not a minute more Ending Violence Against Women



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UNIFEM
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UNIFEM

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UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies that promote women's human rights, political participation and economic security. UNIFEM works in partnership with UN organizations, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and networks to promote gender equality. It links women's issues and concerns to national, regional and global agendas by fostering collaboration and providing technical expertise on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment strategies.

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Bangladeshi women demanding an end to violence perpetrated by male partners, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November 2000.

PHOTO BY JEWEL SAMAD—AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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“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.”

— Sergio Vieira de Mello
‘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, 8 April 2003

Sergio Vieira de Mello was the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and served as the Secretary-General’s Special Representative in Iraq until he was killed in the bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August 2003. He was dedicated to the recognition and protection of human rights and worked tirelessly in many places in the world to ensure that women and their concerns were represented. This report is dedicated to his memory.

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Preface

O

ne in three. That stark figure sums up the crisis confronting women throughout the world. Of three young girls sitting in a classroom, learning to read and write, one will suffer violence directed at her simply because she is female. Of three women sitting in a market, selling their crops, one will be attacked — most likely by her intimate partner — and hurt so severely she may no longer be able to provide for her family. Throughout the world, this violence will be repeated: globally, one in three women will be raped, beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Violence against women has become as much a pandemic as HIV/AIDS or malaria. But it is still generally downplayed by the public at large and by policy-makers who fail to create and fund programmes to eradicate it.

Yet there is hope. It rests in the fact that in a relatively short time, women and their advocates have transformed the way gender-based violence is understood, and have promoted international documents and treaties that recognize, for the first time, women's right to live free of violence. Many organizations and activists have collaborated to arrive at this new level of action and commitment. At UNIFEM, we have been engaged in combating violence against women for more than a decade. As the Women's Fund at the United Nations we have been both a privileged witness and a close partner in the efforts to raise the visibility of gender-based violence. Our knowledge of women's lives and the danger they live with informs our work at all levels. We have funded women's organizing and strategic programmes to halt violence. We have listened to women and helped them create environments in which they feel safe. And we have brought the voices of women from their villages, towns and cities to the United Nations — to the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1994 and the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995; to the UN General Assembly in 1999 and to the Security Council in 2000 — giving voice to those who had been voiceless. The achievements of all those who have worked in this area are monumental: Violence against women has been recognized as a human rights violation; international and regional agreements call for laws and awareness-raising programmes; and services are available to women that did not exist 15 or even 10 years ago.

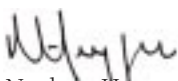
In order to better understand the achievements of the last decades, as well as to assess what our next steps ought to be, in 2002, UNIFEM commissioned outside experts to undertake a series of regional scans of work being done to combat violence against women. The completed scans presented us with a paradox: clearly the efforts so far have brought results; nevertheless, women do not appear to be substantively free from the ravages of violence than they were when the work began. Why does gender-based violence continue, seemingly

unabated? The answer is deceptively simple, but the solution is deeply complex: gender inequality fuels violence against women and the power imbalances it creates are not easily rectified. As long as women in diverse countries do not have access to property and employment and equal wages, to the seats of power, to education, it is possible for governments to ignore them and their needs. Our work to end violence against women must be a conscious part of our work towards the empowerment of women in general.

We cannot change the basic structures of society overnight. But each step in the ongoing effort to eradicate violence puts more pressure on those who condone the violence and allow it to exist. Each step makes it harder to ignore the international agreements to protect and promote women's human rights. This is the moment for a renewed commitment to build on the achievements of the last decades and find the resources for meaningful action. Without this commitment, much of what has been achieved may be lost. That would be a tragedy for all of us, since, as we have learned, women's security is tied to global security. In the words of the UN Commission on Human Security (*Human Security Now*, 2003): "The security of one person, one community, one nation rests on the decisions of many others, sometimes fortuitously, sometimes precariously." In our interconnected world, we are all affected by the decisions of individuals and nations whether close to home or on the other side of the world.

Gender-based violence is part of an intricate web of violence. The trafficking of women is linked to the trafficking of drugs and arms, and an increase in criminality. Rape and sexual abuse are tied to the devastation caused by HIV/AIDS and the destruction of families. Impunity for violence against women suggests impunity for criminal behaviour and the disintegration of the rule of law. Violence against women is tied also to the brutality of war, an issue that was taken up extensively in *Women War and Peace*, an independent expert assessment commissioned by UNIFEM and published in 2002.

Our goal in this report is to highlight achievements and indicate what must be done to build on these achievements. The report provides examples of good practices as well as of efforts that did not meet the goals set out for them — and explores why not. It looks at the challenges ahead, and asks what the most fruitful next steps might be. The work of the last decades indicates several directions for the future, but one of the most critical areas is the need for collaboration and partnerships. No one government or international agency or civil society organization can hope to have an impact alone. Pooling resources, sharing strengths and knowledge and listening to local leaders will allow end-violence efforts to move to the next level. We hope that that the lessons gathered here will serve as a tool, a prod and an inspiration to those entrusted with building the rule of law and honouring human rights as the basis for human security everywhere.



Noeleen Heyzer

Executive Director, UNIFEM