

Ending Violence against Women: System-wide efforts to enhance implementation

Presentation by Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM
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Madame Chairperson, esteemed delegates, colleagues and friends,

I am very pleased to address this 51st session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and to present to you the [Note from the Secretary-General on the Report of UNIFEM on the activities of the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women](#) (E/CN.6/2007/6-A/HRC/4/069).

Violence against women is one of the most widespread human rights violations. However, as the report before you shows, ten years of innovation, experience and activism have shown that ending violence against women is possible. It is a pandemic that can be stopped, given the necessary political will and resources.

For over two decades women have struggled to break through the shame and silence that surrounds this violence to put it on every national and global agenda, and last year, the General Assembly adopted a strong Resolution to intensify efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (A/RES/61/143).

UNIFEM has consistently supported the work to end violence. In 1996 we welcomed the establishment of the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women by the General Assembly, as a system-wide funding mechanism to move this work forward ([A/RES/50/166](#)). Through it, Member States, civil society and UN partners have come together to invest in practical steps to end the violence that has fractured communities, devastated lives, and robbed the gifts and potential of millions of women and girls.

This year, the Trust Fund is celebrating its tenth anniversary. Since its establishment it has awarded over \$13 million to 226 initiatives in over 100 countries. Trust Fund grantees — including NGOs, governments and UN partners — address the multiple forms of violence that women experience, including home-based violence; harmful practices such as early and forced marriage; violence in situations of conflict and crisis; and violence related to trafficking and HIV/AIDS. They focus on prevention and protection, strengthening systems of criminal justice, health care and social services to respond to women survivors and provide needed support.

However, without the strong leadership and necessary level of investment, the Trust Fund will continue to struggle to institutionalize the strategic, practical actions that can bring about change on a larger and deeper scale. We have learned from the work of the Trust Fund that no single intervention will end violence against women and girls. This requires a holistic approach, with interlinked strategies, including:

- revising legal and policy frameworks;
- strengthening institutional accountability;
- changing public awareness through advocacy campaigns;

- working with community leaders and partnering with men and youth;
- strengthening social support services; and
- supporting research and data to empower women advocates.

Together these strategies can significantly reduce violence and its consequences. For them to succeed in addressing violence at its roots, however, violence against women and girls must be seen for what it is — a gross violation of their human rights, and totally unacceptable, in all contexts and situations.

As the UN system integrates human rights into all aspects of its work, UNIFEM has been at the forefront of efforts to ensure that women’s human rights are at the centre of this work, especially at the country level. The new CCA/UNDAF guidelines now provide clear directives on the centrality of women’s human rights to UN Country Team programming. UNIFEM has also played a leadership role in inter-agency efforts to enhance NGO and UN system engagement with the CEDAW Committee.

In the last decade, UNIFEM has also spearheaded a set of regional and global advocacy campaigns, working with Member States and UN partners, media and women’s groups to change laws, develop national action plans and scale up community-based interventions to end violence against women and girls. Since 2005, the Trust Fund to End Violence against Women has supported governments and NGOs to implement these laws, policies and action plans. Now we are taking this struggle to the next stage — to institutionalize the strategic, practical actions that can bring about change, and incorporate them into national development planning, and state accountability mechanisms.

The GA resolution to intensify efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women recognizes the work done by UN entities, funds and programmes and specialized agencies, and urges them to enhance their coordination more systematically.

In an encouraging first step, the system is now coming together in an interagency initiative to address the widespread and severe sexual violence that women experience in conflict and crisis situations. Inspired by the assessment conducted by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Elisabeth Rehn, [Women, War and Peace](#), which UNIFEM commissioned to put the issue of sexual violence in conflict on the global agenda, a core group of agencies came together to propel greater inter-agency action. The resulting “UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict,” which now includes ten agencies, brings system-wide support to country-led efforts to address such violence.

Critical to the success of these initiatives, as the GA resolution recognizes, is institutional support and the necessary level of resources. The resolution urges states to take actions to end violence against women through a more systematic, comprehensive and sustained approach. It calls upon the UN system to use and promote the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women as a system-wide funding mechanism for addressing all forms of violence against women and girls. It also strongly encourages Member States to significantly increase their financial support for activities related to ending violence against women, including specifically to this UN Trust Fund.

Madame Chairperson, we are here at a critical moment. In the context of UN reform, and the need to operate as one UN at the country level, this is a moment to show how we as a system can deliver on gender equality. There has been significant progress in creating the normative standards for gender equality and women’s human rights. What is still needed is system-wide action to ensure implementation and accountability.

We have the building blocks in place to work systematically to end violence against women and girls. At the global level, we have the [Secretary-General’s In-depth report on all forms of violence against women](#) (A/61/122), the General Assembly resolution to intensify actions to eliminate such violence, and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women as a system-wide funding mechanism. At the country level, there are normative and legal frameworks in place and promising action plans, strategies and partnerships to implement them. What is needed now is a serious coherent strategy and resources to upscale the work through a stronger and well positioned women’s agency within the UN system,

bringing the system together to work with national partners to promote the strategies and practices that have worked.

Only then can the UN, in partnership with Member States and the women's movement, be at the forefront of efforts to end this scourge. Only then will violence against women become a rare occurrence rather than a global pandemic. Only then will women be able to live free of violence — because it is our right.