

Media Update

24 November 2018

United Nations

MESSAGE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

25 November 2018

Violence against women and girls is a global pandemic. It is a moral affront to all women and girls, a mark of shame on all our societies and a major obstacle to inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. At its core, violence against women and girls is the manifestation of a profound lack of respect – a failure by men to recognize the inherent equality and dignity of women. It is an issue of fundamental human rights.

Violence can take many forms -- from domestic attacks to trafficking, from sexual violence in conflict to child marriage, genital mutilation and femicide. It harms the individual and has far-reaching consequences for families and society. This is also a deeply political issue. Violence against women is tied to broader issues of power and control in our societies. We live in a male-dominated society. Women are made vulnerable to violence through the multiple ways in which we keep them unequal.

In the past year we have seen growing attention to one manifestation of this violence. Sexual harassment is experienced by most women at some point in their lives. Increasing public disclosure by women from all regions and all walks of life is bringing the magnitude of the problem to light and demonstrating the galvanizing power of women's movements to drive the action and awareness needed to eliminate harassment and violence everywhere.

This year, the global United Nations UNiTE campaign to end violence against women and girls is highlighting our support for survivors and advocates under the theme 'Orange the World: #HearMeToo'. With orange as the unifying



colour of solidarity, the #HearMeToo hashtag is designed to send a clear message: violence against women and girls must end now, and we all have a role to play.

The same message resonates through the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative. This 500-million-euro programme will empower survivors and advocates to become agents of change in their homes, communities and countries. But while this initial investment is significant, it is small given the scale of need. It should be seen as seed funding for a global movement. Not until the half of our population represented by women and girls can live free from fear, violence and everyday insecurity, can we truly say we live in a fair and equal world.

Background:

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Taking a Stand Against Gender-Based Violence

Despite the adoption of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by the UN General Assembly in 1979, violence against women and girls remains a pervasive problem worldwide.

To that end, the General Assembly issued resolution 48/104, laying the foundation for the road towards a world free of gender-based violence.

Another bold step in the right direction was embodied by an initiative launched in 2008 and known as the UNiTE to End Violence against Women. It aims to raise public awareness around the issue as well as increase both policymaking and resources dedicated to ending violence against women and girls worldwide.

Yet, there is still a long way to go at the global scale. To date, only two out of three countries have outlawed domestic violence, while 37 countries worldwide still exempt rape perpetrators from prosecution if they are married to or eventually marry the victim and 49 countries currently have no laws protecting women from domestic violence.

In 2017, the European Union (EU) and the UN launched the Spotlight Initiative, which aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and

girls by raising the awareness of this issue, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

Women's rights activists have observed 25 November as a day against gender-based violence since 1981. This date was selected to honour the Mirabal sisters, three political activists from the Dominican Republic who were brutally murdered in 1960 by order of the country's ruler, Rafael Trujillo (1930-1961).

On 20 December 1993, the General Assembly adopts the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women through resolution 48/104, paving the path towards eradicating violence against women and girls worldwide.

Finally, on 7 February 2000, the General Assembly adopts resolution 54/134, officially designating 25 November as the International day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and in doing so, inviting governments, international organizations as well as NGOs to join together and organize activities designed to raise public awareness of the issue every year on that date.

UN Women

MESSAGE FROM PHUMZILE MLAMBO-NGCUKA, UN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UN WOMEN

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

25 November 2018

We still do not know the true extent of violence against women, as the fear of reprisals, impact of not being believed, and the stigma borne by the survivor—not the perpetrator—have silenced the voices of millions of survivors of violence and masked the true extent of women's continued horrific experiences.



In the recent past, grassroots activists and survivors, as well as global movements such as “#MeToo”, “#TimesUp”, “#BalanceTonPorc”, “#NiUnaMenos”, “HollaBack!” and “#TotalShutdown” have converted isolation into global sisterhood. They are making offenders accountable, exposing the prevalence of violence from high office to factory floor. Today’s global movements are setting collective demands for accountability and action and calling for the end of impunity, to ensure the human rights of all women and girls.

This year’s United Nations theme for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is “Orange the World: #HearMeToo”. It aims to honour and further amplify voices, whether a housewife at home, a schoolgirl abused by her teacher, an office secretary, a sportswoman, or a boy who is an intern in a business, bringing them together across locations and sectors in a global movement of solidarity. It is a call to listen to and believe survivors, to end the culture of silencing and to put the survivors at the centre of the response. The focus must change from questioning the credibility of the victim, to pursuing the accountability of the perpetrator.

Those who have spoken out have helped us understand better just how much sexual harassment has been normalized and even justified as an inevitable part of a woman’s life. Its ubiquity, including within the United Nations system, has helped it seem a minor, everyday inconvenience that can be ignored or tolerated, with only the really horrific events being worthy of the difficulty of reporting. This is a vicious cycle that has to stop.

#HearMeToo is therefore also a strong call to law enforcement. It is deeply wrong that the vast majority of perpetrators of violence against women and girls face no consequences. Only a minority of cases are ever reported to the police; an even smaller percentage result in charges, and in only a fraction of those cases is there a conviction. Police and judicial institutions must take reports seriously, and prioritize the safety and wellbeing of survivors, for example by making more female officers available for women reporting violence.

Laws must recognize that sexual harassment is a form of discrimination against women and a human rights violation, both expressing and re-generating inequality, that occurs in many arenas of life, from schools to workplaces, in public spaces and online. If laws protect both formal and informal workplaces, the most vulnerable workers, like those dependent on tips from customers for their income, will have a better chance to speak out

against abuse, and be heard. Employers themselves in every country can make vital impacts by independently enforcing standards of behaviour that reinforce gender equality and zero tolerance for any form of abuse.

UN Women is at the forefront of efforts to end all forms of violence against women and girls through the work we do, from our UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women that benefited over 6 million individuals last year, to the 500-million-Euro EU-UN Spotlight initiative, which is the largest ever single investment in the elimination of violence against women and girls worldwide, to our work on safe cities and safe public spaces. In addition, we are working within UN Women and the UN system as a whole to address sexual harassment and the abuse of power within our own workplaces.

This year, together with you, we aim to support all those whose voices are still not yet being heard.
