



Check against Delivery

**UNFPA Executive Director
Thoraya Ahmed Obaid**

Visit to Australia

**Seminar on the Elimination of
Violence against Women**

**3 December 2009
Canberra, Australia**

Good day to all of you, as you say in Australia!

Thank you, Chris, for your introduction and thank you for hosting us today. The UN Information Center provided me and my colleagues with so much help and assistance to prepare for this visit. I am very grateful for all that you and your team have done to make it a success.

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to address this seminar on the elimination of violence against women.

I come from New York where last week I attended the commemorations at UN headquarters for the International Day of Elimination of Violence against Women. At the commemoration, Secretary-General BAN Ki-Moon launched a Network of Men Leaders, as part of his campaign “UNiTE to End Violence Against Women”.

Members of the new Network include Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho; Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero; Italian Foreign Minister Franco Fattini; former Chilean president Ricardo Lagos; Nobel Peace Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa; and many other distinguished men who have decided to take a public stance for the elimination of violence against women.

The UNiTE campaign launched last year is galvanizing action across the United Nations system and across the world. It calls for all countries to put in place, by the year 2015, strong laws, multi-sectoral action plans, preventive measures, data collection, and systematic efforts to address violence against women and girls. It is an unified effort of the UN system to generate momentum and concrete action.

The United Nations is also on the verge of significant changes in its internal gender architecture. The proposals being discussed by the General Assembly call for the replacement of several current structures with a single dynamic United Nations entity that would significantly bolster our work to promote gender equality and address violence against women. A decision is expected soon.

Beyond our own operations, the United Nations Trust Fund on Violence against Women has distributed more than \$44 million to almost 300 initiatives in 119 countries and territories.

Over the years, we have seen great efforts by governments, NGOs, women’s groups, community groups and other networks to eliminate violence against women. Today, there is better understanding of the nature and scope of violence and of its impact on women and society. Legal and policy frameworks have been established at the national and international levels. But much more needs to be done so that there can be an end to the suffering of too many women and girls.

Violence against women remains hidden in a culture of silence. The Secretary-General's campaign and many other efforts are breaking the silence and ensuring that violence against women is not just a woman's issue but primarily a political, social, economic and cultural issue that concerns men as well.

In every country, women and girls continue to be plagued by violence. It is often repeated that one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in some other way - most often by someone she knows. Yes, 70 per cent of women experience some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

Such violence violates human rights, undermines development, generates instability, and makes peace that much harder to achieve. There must be accountability for the violations, and concrete steps to end impunity. Survivors must be listened to and supported.

There must be an end to these inexcusable crimes -- whether it is the use of rape as a weapon of war, domestic violence, sex trafficking, so-called "honour" crimes or 'crimes of passion, and female genital mutilation/cutting. We must address the roots of this violence by eradicating discrimination and changing the mindsets that perpetuate it.

For this, we need strong and sustained leadership.

I praise the exemplary leadership of Australia's Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, for proactively addressing this issue. I am impressed by his active involvement as a White Ribbon Ambassador. The pledge he took on 25 November to end and never excuse violence against women is a remarkable act.

Partnering with men and boys to eliminate violence against women and girls can result in real change and success. Men are already taking positive actions around the world, such as judges whose decisions have paved the way for fighting abuse in the workplace; networks of men who counsel male perpetrators of violence; and national leaders, such as Prime Minister Rudd, who have publicly committed to leading the movement of men to break the silence.

The challenge now is to shift the effort from mobilizing some men to mobilizing all leaders. We must include leaders in communities, religious leaders and youth leaders. We must also engage leaders from the private sector. Men's involvement in ending violence against women should not just be perceived as 'good for women' but it is also 'good for men'. Ending violence against women humanizes the feelings of men and moves them towards a more balanced relationship with their partners, based on mutual trust and respect. Men's involvement in ending violence against women is the way men support the achievement of human rights for all.

Research shows that men want to be involved, and that many welcome the idea of mutually satisfying relationships built on trust and communication.

Many UNFPA programmes seek to increase men's sense of ownership over new

initiatives that promote gender equity, equality and women's empowerment. They aim to increase men's comfort with seeing themselves as responsible, caring, and non-violent partners. It helps them deal with the social pressures on them to act as "men" should act and supports them to act as "people" should act. They also recognize the diversity of men's reproductive and sexual health needs, including those of young men, and those who are economically deprived or displaced.

For decades, UNFPA has worked with uniformed services -- the police, army and UN peacekeepers--to reach out to men with information, education and services on family life and family planning. This experience is now being applied to a wider spectrum of concerns, including violence against women.

And if there is one key lesson to be learned from our experience, it is the value of partnership between men and women. It is not women or men working alone to end gender-based violence that yields the best results. It is the partnership between them that has the greatest impact and reach.

Just as violence against women does not know social or economic borders, it does not know national borders. All countries are affected by it, including here in Australia and in neighboring countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

UNFPA supported three studies of domestic violence in the Pacific region – two of them with the generous support of AusAID. The findings show that domestic violence is extensive and pervasive. In both the Solomon Islands and Kiribati, more than 60 percent of women reported physical and/or sexual violence from their partners and less than 20 percent sought help or support from any formal services.

The UNFPA Office for the Pacific is working with governments and partners to urgently address the pervasive violence against women. The office undertook an assessment of national policies and laws. It also looked at the broader issue of gender mainstreaming in national development plans of ten Pacific Islands countries. In these countries, as in many others, gender is addressed in a separate section of the plans and most countries did not address gender concerns in their policy documents, including the elimination of violence against women.

This lack of basis in policies and laws is worrying, especially as we hear increasing reports of sexual violence against women and girls, incest, sexual exploitation, witchcraft killings and trafficking in countries in the region.

This is complicated by the existence of outdated laws related to family, marriage and divorce, child custody, property rights, nationality, employment. These laws are being revised gradually, especially as a result of the reporting process on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW. But the process is long and time-consuming.

The availability of data on this issue is an extremely important step and will serve as a

basis to prepare comprehensive interventions. With UNFPA's support, countries in the region are drafting National Plans of Action to Eliminate Violence against Women and the UN Gender Group in the Pacific is developing a joint UN programme to address this issue.

At the global level, we are also strengthening our capacities for information and analysis. The Secretary-General's database on violence against women was launched earlier this year and is the first global "one-stop-site" for information on measures undertaken by Member States to address violence against women. It will also help identify promising practices that can fight impunity and put an end to attitudes and stereotypes that permit or condone violence.

UNFPA is part of this effort. We are documenting successful approaches and disseminating good practices.

We have documented good programmes in Indonesia and Honduras, where police and faith-based organizations were trained to respond sensitively to violence against women.

In Guatemala, much progress was achieved simply through improved coordination and synergy between the national and local governments.

In India and Nepal, national partners worked together to institutionalize a response with a special focus on using the health system as an entry point.

In Cambodia, a national law to address domestic violence was adopted in 2007 and gender equality and addressing gender-based violence is part of the national development plan.

Many programmes use reproductive health interventions as an entry point for identifying victims and providing counselling and referrals.

We know that violence has profound effects – direct and indirect – on a woman's reproductive health. This includes unwanted pregnancies and restricted access to family planning information and contraceptives, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and psychological problems.

Perhaps no other service provider has as great an opportunity to aid women survivors of violence as health care workers. For some women, the chance to visit a health clinic may be their only hope to end the abuse. Linking universal access to reproductive health to the response to gender-based violence, including for prevention and diagnosis, is a critical strategy that must be maximized.

This is all the more important in humanitarian settings, where sexual violence is common. In many conflicts, women's bodies become battlegrounds and rape becomes a method of warfare to humiliate, dominate or disrupt social ties.

UNFPA is working with partners to respond to these unacceptable crimes. We are encouraged by recent Security Council resolutions 1888 and 1889 that strengthen the nexus between women, peace and security and build on Resolution 1325 to call for an end to impunity on sexual violence against women and girls.

As you know, in its resolution 1325 adopted in 2000, the Security Council addressed for the first time the impact of war on women, stressing the importance of women's inclusion in conflict resolution and their essential role in peacebuilding.

Last year, in resolution 1820, the Security Council acknowledged that sexual violence is a security issue and therefore requires a security response.

Resolution 1889, adopted this year, links for the first time in a Security Council resolution peace and security with women's reproductive rights and mental health.

It encourages Member States "to provide support for greater physical security and better socio-economic conditions, through [...] access to basic services, in particular health services, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and mental health, gender-responsive law enforcement and access to justice [...]"

Resolution 1889 also urges Member States, the UN, donors and civil society to ensure that women's protection and empowerment are taken into account during post-conflict needs assessment and planning, and factored into subsequent funding and programming. And it requests the development of a set of indicators for use at the global level to track implementation of Resolution 1325.

Security Council resolution 1888 specifically mandates peacekeeping missions to protect women and children from sexual violence during armed conflict. The Security Council also requested the UN Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative to provide coherent and strategic leadership to address the issue.

All these resolutions provide a strong framework to engage women in conflict resolution, peacemaking and peacebuilding, to protect sexual and reproductive health and prevent violence against women in conflicts and to protect them when violence does occur.

Only five peace accords have referred to the use of sexual violence as a military and political tactic, despite its increase in both frequency and brutality. Institutions that implement peace agreements often fail to address women's needs for justice, for addressing perpetrators of sexual violence by security forces, or for properly designed and targeted public services.

Sixteen countries have developed National Action Plans to guide the implementation of resolution 1325. Some countries, such as Liberia or Ivory Coast, have recently emerged from conflict.

UNFPA provided financial and technical assistance for the development of these plans.

In collaboration with UNIFEM and the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues, we are developing and refining indicators for these plans.

UNFPA is also a member of the campaign, “Stop Rape Now: UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict”.

There is a growing number of grassroots initiatives by civil society, government institutions and other partners to speak out against violence against women in conflicts. Security Council resolution 1325 has been translated in more than 100 languages. NGOs are mobilized in many countries experiencing conflicts to prevent violence against women and protect them when it occurs.

I am encouraged by all these initiatives. And I am encouraged by the SPRINT initiative that was launched here in Australia last year to ensure that persons have access to sexual and reproductive health during times of crisis. The SPRINT initiative brings together many partners to ensure that these services are provided as a basic human right.

Violence against women must be given greater priority at all levels and the initiatives I have outlined are part of this broader effort. But the need for greater political commitment remains, as does the need for a substantial increase of resources.

The United Nations system as a whole is committed to intensified, coordinated, and urgent action to help governments prevent, punish, and eliminate violence against women.

More than sixty years ago, the founders of the United Nations reaffirmed their faith in “We, the People”, in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women. Eliminating violence against women is a crucial step towards realizing this vision. This is not just an issue for women; it is an issue for everyone: for men and boys, for families, for communities... it is a both a global and a national issue.

From common to rare, from accepted to unacceptable, from impunity to justice, from suffering to support, we must build a world where violence against women belongs to the past.

Thank you for your attention.