

## **Violence against women**

### **I. Global commitments**

In 1993, the General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women<sup>1</sup> defined violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” The Platform for Action sets out three strategic objectives under the critical area of concern D, “violence against women”:

- take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women;
- study the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures; and
- eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking.

The main areas of action to be taken by Governments under these strategic objectives include: implementation of international human rights norms and instruments relating to violence against women, including trafficking; adoption, implementation and periodic review of legislation that emphasizes the prevention of violence and prosecution of offenders; protection of women subjected to violence; provision of access to just and effective remedies; and development of plans of action, creation of institutional mechanisms, allocation of resources, awareness raising measures, and data collection and research. These areas of action were reaffirmed by the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”, which called upon States to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination and violence against women by any person, organization or enterprise, to treat all forms of violence against women and girls as criminal offences, and to adopt comprehensive anti-trafficking strategies and prevent victims of trafficking from being persecuted for illegal entry or residence.<sup>2</sup>

Since the adoption of the Platform for Action in 1995 and the Outcome Document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000, there has been a significant increase in action at the global, regional and national levels aimed at the elimination of all forms and manifestations of violence against women, as a matter of priority. The international legal framework has been expanded. In November 2000, the General Assembly adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol), supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The Palermo Protocol, which entered into force in December 2003, provides the first definition of trafficking in persons and requires States Parties to recognize trafficking in persons as a criminal offence, paying particular attention to the situation of women and children. On 1 July 2002, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) entered into force, providing the broadest statutory recognition of gender-based violence as a crime under international criminal law to date.



International action to address violence against women in armed conflict has gained similar momentum. In 2000, the Security Council for the first time dealt with the question of women, peace and security in resolution 1325 (2000), which called for special measures to protect women and girls from gender-bas





**killings** and related legislation, while in the Russian Federation, specialized seminars on the prevention of forced marriages have been held at the All Russian Advanced Training Institute and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Training programmes



addressing violence against women.<sup>13</sup> Heads of State of 17 Ibero-American countries signed on to UNIFEM's Say NO to Violence against Women campaign at the XVIII Ibero-American Summit, held in San Salvador, 29-31 October 2008, while eighty-one high-ranking government officials from 42 African countries, signed on to the campaign at the joint AU/UNECA Conference of Ministers of Gender and Women's Affairs, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 25–29 August 2008.<sup>14</sup>

States have utilized innovative methods to increase public awareness of, and sensitivity to, the issue of violence against women, as well as to inform women victims/survivors of their rights. Many States have implemented national awareness-raising campaigns on violence against women, and undertaken specific activities on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November) and the international campaign 16 Days of Activism to End Gender Violence (25 November to 10 December).

In addition to general awareness-raising efforts, States have implemented targeted campaigns that highlight specific forms of violence against women, or that aim to reach particular groups of women. Trafficking of women for sexual exploitation has been the subject of such activities in many countries, and has included the publication of articles, posters, advertisements, and information sheets in electronic and print media; airing of television programmes and videos and creation of anti-trafficking websites, the screening of films and documentaries, the inclusion of human trafficking in school curricula, and public performances, debates and plays. Mexico has implemented steps to raise awareness of violence against migrant women among policymakers, civil society organizations and migrant women themselves.

Measures implemented by States aimed at preventing female genital mutilation have often included community mobilization building on the work of civil society organizations. Activities have been carried out in markets, places of worship, workplaces and via media campaigns. In Ghana and Nigeria, youth peer educators have been trained to work in schools and with out-of-school youth and communities through house-to-house campaigns, sensitizing youth to the dangers of female genital mutilation and the benefits of its eradication. Some countries have worked to provide ex-practitioners of female genital mutilation with alternative livelihoods in order to prevent the practice. The Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), for example, developed strategies for alternative employment for ex-circumcisers in seven States. There has also been an increased engagement of religious leaders and faith-based organizations to address the issue, including in Yemen, Ethiopia and Nigeria. The Dar al-Ifta', the highest Islamic authority in Egypt, has declared that female genital mutilation was a custom and not a religious rite and noted that the practice was prohibited under sharia law.

The role of men and boys in addressing violence against women has been recognized as a key aspect of prevention. In response, campaigns targeting men and boys have been conducted in a number of countries. Awareness-raising programmes for groups of men, such as members of the armed forces and military recruits, have been conducted in Colombia and Turkey. The White Ribbon Campaign is an example of a civil society



initiative aimed at involving men and boys in ending violence against women and girls. The campaign has chapters in many countries, and its participants pledge to never commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women.<sup>15</sup>

In order to prevent the recurrence of violence against women, some States, including Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Philippines, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom, have in place intervention programmes for perpetrators aimed at changing their attitudes and behaviour and preventing further acts of violence.

### ***Collection of data and research on violence against women***

The availability of accurate data and in-depth research can greatly enhance the development of effective laws and policies. A number of countries have collected data on violence against women through nation-wide population-based surveys. As of 2006, at least one survey on violence against women had been conducted in 71 countries and at least one national survey was available in 41 countries. Two multi-country surveys provide comparable data for the countries studied. These are the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women, which has been conducted in at least 12 countries and has involved over 24,000 women; and the International Violence against Women Survey has been carried out in 11 countries to date.<sup>16</sup>

States are also compiling service-based data on violence against women, including through health centres and hospitals, police stations and courts, housing and social welfare services, and hotlines, shelters and other support services. Some States have established, or are working to establish, uniform systems of reporting and registering cases of violence against women, including by developing databases and information systems on violence against women, and/or on trafficking.

Research on violence against women has been undertaken in many countries, and has sometimes been commissioned, or financially supported, by governments. Studies have covered the causes, consequences, as well as costs of different forms of violence against women. In many States, conferences, workshops and seminars have been held to foster a better understanding of the scope, causes and forms, as well as the effects of violence against women on the victims and others, and to develop recommendations for action.

### ***International cooperation and collaboration***

An effective response to trafficking in women and girls, which is frequently a crime of international nature, crossing borders and jurisdictions, requires cooperation and collaboration among countries of origin, transit and destination. Many States have strengthened such efforts and have enhanced bilateral as well as regional and sub-regional agreements. Examples include the cooperation among the countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region; the member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); MERCOSUR and associated countries; and a joint plan of action against trafficking in persons, adopted within the framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECASS).

States are also increasingly prioritizing the elimination of violence against women in their overseas development assistance. For example, in 2008 the Netherlands allocated €21 million for a period of three years to support national efforts in eight countries for the development and implementation of national action plans on violence against women. In 2007-2008, the following governments made financial contributions to the UN Trust Fund for the Elimination of Violence against Women: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago and United States of America.

### **III. Gaps and challenges**

Despite the significant increase in activities across the globe to address violence against women, violence against women persists in all countries, and many perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity for their crimes.

While promising developments in legal frameworks to address violence against women have taken place in many countries, legislative deficiencies continue to exist. Among the frequently noted deficiencies are: lack of specific provisions on many forms of violence against women; definitions of rape that specify use of force rather than lack of consent; reduction in rape sentences where the perpetrator marries the victim; treatment of sexual violence as a crime against the honour of the family or against decency or society, rather than against women's right to bodily integrity; definitions of domestic violence that are limited to physical violence; and inadequate penalties for perpetrators. Many countries do not provide victims/survivors with immediate means of redress and protection, such as protection orders, and laws in many States continue to punish victims/survivors of trafficking for their so-called "illegal" entry into the country. Even when trafficked victims/survivors are correctly identified, the law often states that they are ineligible to receive services if they do not participate in the prosecution of the trafficker.

#### **Strategy for accelerating implementation: Enacting comprehensive laws**

The adoption of laws provides a comprehensive legal framework for activities to address violence against women. The inclusion of provisions which enhance the capacity of the law to be thoroughly and appropriately implemented, such as provisions mandating training of





**Strategy for accelerating implementation: Providing integrated services for victims/survivors**

One of the best-known good practices in service provision involves bringing together services in one location, often called a “one-stop”, or integrated, centre. Such a service was first developed in the largest Government-run general hospital in Malaysia. The victim/survivor is first examined and treated by a doctor and is seen by a counsellor within 24 hours in a separate examination room that protects privacy and confidentiality. If it appears that the victim will be in danger if she returns home, the doctor or counsellor arranges for her to go to an emergency shelter or admits her to the accident and emergency ward for 24 hours. If the patient chooses not to seek shelter, she is encouraged to return to see a social worker at the hospital at a later date. She is also encouraged to make a report at the police unit based in the hospital. In a case involving severe injury, the police see the patient in the ward to record her statement and start investigations. This model is currently being replicated in much of Asia as well as in other countries, including South Africa.<sup>18</sup>

The persistence of attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender stereotypes, gender inequality, and violence against women in all parts of the world is a further challenge to preventing and eliminating violence against women. Constant efforts and comprehensive strategies are required to eliminate gender stereotypes and attitudes that perpetuate notions of women’s inferiority, and to create an enabling environment supportive of women’s human rights. It is important to ensure that there is awareness among the general public at all levels of society, and especially among women and girls, that violence against women is unacceptable.

**Strategy for accelerating implementation: Demonstrating political will**

Leadership at all levels – local, national, regional and international – and by all sectors, including State actors, opinion makers, business leaders, civil society organizations and community leaders and opinion makers, to end all forms of violence against women is critical in generating political will and sustained action to end societal tolerance of, and complicity in, violence against women.

Displaying leadership at the highest level, Albania’s Prime Minister declared the year 2008 as the ‘Year for the fight against domestic violence’. This call to action by the Prime Minister was accompanied by exemplary leadership in the National Parliament. From November 2007 to January 2008, the Speaker of Parliament condemned domestic violence in televised public service announcements and parliament designated 30 November 2007 as the official parliamentary day against domestic violence.

On 20 June 2007, Brazil’s President, Luiz Inácio532.44 247.44 0.48 12 13.8 refBT/P A/CID 35 BDC 0 DC 0



