



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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**REMARKS TO THE COMMISSION
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**
New York, 25 February 2008

Mr. President of ECOSOC,
Distinguished Ministers,
Mr. Chairperson of the Commission,
Excellencies,
Civil society representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured and moved to be with you today.

Standing here before the Commission on the Status of Women, whose members have done so much for gender equality worldwide, I am energized by your activism and inspired by your achievements.

Today, we come together to launch a global campaign to end violence against women. I am counting on you -- advocates from Government, civil society and the UN -- to carry our message around the world.

Violence against women is an issue that cannot wait. A brief look at the statistics makes it clear. At least one out of every three women is likely to be beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Through the practice of prenatal sex selection, countless others are denied the right even to exist. No country, no culture, no woman young or old is immune to this scourge. Far too often, the crimes go unpunished, the perpetrators walk free.

War has always been devastating, but now, women and girls are themselves targets in the war zone. Today's weapons of armed conflict include rape, sexual violence, and the abduction of children conscripted as soldiers or forced into sexual slavery.

On my visits to conflict-torn areas around the world, I have spoken with women who have endured horrific forms of violence. I will forever be haunted by their suffering -- but equally, I will always be inspired by their courage. These mothers, sisters, daughters and friends are determined to reclaim their lives.

This is a campaign for them. It is a campaign for the women and girls who have the right to live free of violence, today and in the future. It is a campaign to stop the untold cost that violence against women inflicts on all humankind.

We know that gender inequality is hampering progress towards the Millennium Development Goals -- our common vision to build a better world in the 21st century.

We know that violence against women compounds the enormous social and economic toll on families, communities, even whole nations.

And we know that when we work to eradicate violence against women, we empower our greatest resource for development: mothers raising children; law-makers in parliament; chief executives, negotiators, teachers; doctors, policewomen, peacekeepers and more.

And so my campaign to end violence against women will continue until 2015 to coincide with the target date for the Millennium Development Goals.

We have solid policy frameworks and initiatives to build on.

UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict brings together 12 entities across the United Nations family, from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to the World Health Organization.

The UN Task Force on violence against women is spearheading joint programming at the national level.

The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, set up eleven years ago, has supported partners in communities, nations and regions around the world.

Just last December, the General Assembly adopted a historic resolution on rape and sexual violence.

And the landmark resolution 1325 on women, peace and security adopted by the Security Council seven years ago raised the issue to the level it deserves.

Today, I call again on the Security Council to establish a mechanism dedicated to monitoring violence against women and girls, under the framework of resolution 1325.

Let us remember: there is no blanket approach to fighting violence against women. What works in one country may not lead to desired results in another. Each nation must devise its own strategy.

But there is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable.

In this campaign, I will personally approach world leaders to spur action through national campaigns.

I will urge all States to review applicable laws, and to revise them or enact new ones to ensure that violence against women is always criminalized. And I will call on all States to enforce their laws to end impunity.

I will encourage the media to take our message far and wide, and urge regional organizations to set priorities and targets.

I will galvanize the UN system to provide stronger and more effective support to all stakeholders, at the local, national, regional and global level.

I will form a global network of male leaders to assist me in mobilizing men and boys – men in Government, men in the arts and sports, men in business, men in the religious sphere, men in every walk of life, who know what leadership truly means.

I will work hand in hand with women’s groups worldwide. The progress over the past century happened thanks to them, and they will be our chief standard bearers in the future too.

And I will propose a high-level event in 2010 to review what we have accomplished, exchange best practices and map out the steps ahead.

Dear friends,

Our campaign will build on a deep and broad partnership, bringing in all society to take us to the end of violence against women and girls everywhere.

To help us reach our destination, I call on young people around the world -- our leaders of tomorrow.

I call on the private sector around the world, whose reach is indispensable in advancing our cause.

I call on women’s groups around the world, whose valiance and vision have brought us to where we are today, and who will keep charting the way forward.

I call on men around the world to lead by example: to make clear that violence against women is an act perpetrated by a coward, and that speaking up against it is a badge of honour.

I call on Member States around the world: the responsibility, above all, lies with you.

I call on all of you to pledge with me:

United We Shall Succeed.

Thank you very much.