The 1st Gender Justice in Namibia Colloquium unveils to end violence against children and women and gender based violence

“Strengthening Community-Based Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence and Violence against Children and women”

WINDHOEK, 1 October 2013 – The Government of Namibia in collaboration with UNICEF opened today the 1st Gender Justice in Namibia Colloquium to forge greater commitment for concrete actions against Gender Based Violence and Violence against Children and women in the country.

A gathering of over 100 participants from ten countries including Namibia, Western and Southern African countries, United States of America are gathering for a three day best practices sharing and learning. Hosted by the Ministry of Gender Equality & Child Welfare and the Ministry of Justice, in partnership with UNICEF, the platform aims to build consensus amongst participants to advocate, raise awareness and take action on violence against children and women prevention and response.

The meeting will stress the crucial role families, communities, governments, civil society and individuals can play in scaling up prevention, rescue, protection, and rehabilitation measures that have proven to work in Southern Africa and other parts of the world; and will discuss the role that laws and budgets play in providing justice for survivors of violence while holding governments accountable to their commitments and obligations.

In a continent where women believe wife-beating can be justified, millions of women and girls are still perceived of and treated as subordinate to men and boys due to the predominance of the system of patriarchy. Violence against women is thus accepted as a cultural norm in many societies and is often condoned by community and sometimes state leaders.

Surveys from countries in the Southern African region including Namibia show 22-38% of girls below age 18 have experienced sexual abuse. While girls are more frequently subject to sexual abuse, the data tell us that boys suffer more frequently physical and emotional abuse. In most cases, perpetrators are people known to the victim, rather than strangers.

Laws and Policies addressing Gender Based Violence and Violence against Children, have been enacted in Namibia and several countries and are already showing results by ensuring that there is age appropriate justice system response when dealing with the most vulnerable children.

“The proof is clear - child and women sensitive special protection measures such as multi-sectoral early detection, prevention and response interventions, make a real difference in the lives of women and children who have to cope as victims and survivors of different forms of violence”. “These measures can also foster social stability, particularly in countries with high levels of poverty, inequalities and disparity,” said Micaela Marques de Sousa, UNICEF Representative in Namibia.

Some of the upper middle income countries in Southern Africa, including Angola, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa are characterized by the most severe income inequalities in the world, as measured by the Gini coefficient.

In the past two decades, many African countries have signed and ratified international and regional treaties and conventions such as the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the SADC Protocol on Gender Equality. The Maputo Protocol known as the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa signed and ratified by 28 African member states in 2010, highlights the importance of integrating strategies that addresses and eliminates all forms of social and cultural practices harmful to women including gender based violence.

Trends in Southern African Development Community also show that there is a strong legislation framework across the Southern African, including comprehensive anti-rape legislation. In Namibia, a draft Child Care and Protection Bill that lays down special protection measures to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and neglect of children is currently being debated by Parliament.

Implementation plans, however remain under-resourced and in-country capacity is limited to ensure delivery of all services as mandated by the laws.

“We congratulate Namibia for placing Gender Based Violence and violence against children and women high on the national agenda,” said the Head of the European Union in Namibia, Ambassador Raul Fuentes Milan. “Working together with development partners, countries, including Namibia should allocate adequate financial and human resources and improve services to prevent and respond to violence against children and women while providing support to victims and survivors” added Ambassador Milani.

This meeting will build on the accelerated action already taken by the Government of Namibia to end violence against children and women, which includes the adoption of the National Plan of Action against Gender Based Violence and the National Conference on Gender Based Violence held in Windhoek in July 2014.

Participants will be able to share best practices and lessons learned, discuss the latest evidence from the region and gain a deeper understanding of the tools at their disposal to plan and respond to Gender Based Violence and violence against children.

“The Government of Namibia remains committed to halting gender based violence and violence against children and women in Namibia. This calls for an integrated response approach with the involvement and commitment of not only the Government but of families, traditional leaders, communities private sector, the media, UN agencies and development partners” said Advocate Martha Imalwa, Prosecutor General of the Government of Namibia. “This forum is an important step in building alliances across borders to create the demand within countries for tangible workable solutions,” she added.

Note to the editors:

In a bid to address gender based violence in Africa, the 1st Gender Justice in Africa Colloquium was initiated and hosted by the Prosecuting Authority of the Government of South Africa in 2006 with a focus on ‘Best Practices to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence’. 170 participants from 23 African countries participated and endorsed the Benoni Declaration - Affirming Support for Global and Pan-African Actions to end Violence against Women and Children.
This was followed by the 2nd Gender Justice in Africa Colloquium in 2008 which was convened by the Ethiopian Government. It is during this meeting that participants recognized the important role played by the traditional justice systems in addressing Gender Based Violence at community level.

As a follow-up to the World Report on Violence against Children 2006, UNICEF launched the #ENDviolence against Children Initiative in July 2013. The initiative seeks to highlight the fact that violence is everywhere, but often happens out of sight or is tolerated due to social and cultural norms. The focus of the initiative is on ‘actions’ on the ground that respond to the question: ‘What can we do to #ENDviolence?’ This Colloquium is the third hosted in Africa.

Participants attending this event are from Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Senegal and the United States of America.

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in more than 190 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world’s largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

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