

“Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. And it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace.”

Kofi Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations
'A World Free of Violence Against Women', United Nations
Inter-Agency Global Videoconference, 8 March 1999

Introduction

Violence against women and girls kills and maims vast numbers; it fills their lives with pain and terror, from which some never recover. It exists in every country of the world in some form, and the statistics paint a horrifying picture: 40 per cent of all female homicide victims in the United Kingdom are killed by their intimate partners; every year thousands of women suffer dowry-related deaths or are disfigured by acid thrown in their faces by rejected suitors in Bangladesh, Colombia, India, Nigeria and Pakistan. In 2002, the Council of Europe declared violence against women a major cause of death and disability for women 16 to 44 years of age and called it a public health emergency.¹ And in the United States, the health-related costs of rape, physical assault, stalking and homicide by intimate partners are more than \$5.8 billion every single year.²

Globally, the World Bank estimates that violence against women is as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as cancer and a greater cause of ill-health than traffic accidents and malaria combined.³ One in three women throughout the world will suffer this violence in her lifetime;⁴ she will be beaten, raped, assaulted, trafficked, harassed or forced to submit to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM).⁵ In the majority of cases, the abuser will be a member of the woman's own family or someone known to her.⁶

Exacerbating the problem is the fact that violence in general has not abated. Whether it breaks out as full-scale war, ethnic or religious conflict, terrorism or the violence that regular-



A woman from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico holds a poster that reads 'Not one more! Justice,' during a 25 November 2002 rally to denounce the murders of hundreds of women in Juárez and the surrounding area.

PHOTO BY HENRY ROMERO—REUTERS/LANDOV

ly affects many poor and disenfranchised communities, there is a growing sense of injustice and insecurity in the world that, in a vicious cycle, increases the violence against women. The toll is terrible, and heart-breaking. And yet, as pervasive as this violence is, it can be stopped.

Much of the work has already begun. In the last decade, gender-based violence moved from the shadows to the foreground. It is increasingly recognized as a violation of human rights, as a public health problem and as a crime against women and society. Just ten years ago a rapist in Costa Rica or Peru, for example, could avoid prosecution by offering to marry his victim. Now, the laws granting rapists impunity have been repealed. Just ten years ago, FGM was legal in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt and Ghana. Now the Governments of those countries, as

The vibrancy of the Indian women's movement is evident in the campaigns it has launched since the early 1980s on violence against women. Beginning with legislative reforms of rape laws and dowry deaths, women's groups have campaigned against bride price and domestic violence, among other issues.

Practically every campaign in the 1980s resulted in a legislative reform in favour of women.

– UNIFEM Regional Scan, South Asia

well as others, have banned it. And just ten years ago Cambodians did not even have a term for violence against women in the Khmer language. Domestic violence was explained through a proverb, 'Plates in a basket will rattle', which meant that when people live together clashes are inevitable. Today terms such as rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment are part of the language and shared understanding of many Cambodians, allowing activists to begin work on eradicating this violence.

Women the world over have been the main agents of the remarkable sea change in attitudes and understanding that has occurred. Working as part of international networks, through regional, national and local groups, partnering with each other and with governments, lawyers, health-care workers, police and judges, they have brought new meaning to human rights education. They have marched, held hearings, researched and documented abuses, written papers, opened shelters, trained police forces, stood in courts, educated communities, challenged the media and built the foundations on which current efforts rest. UNIFEM's role during this period has been varied, ranging from supporting innovative and experimental projects in countless areas, to collaborating with myriad organizations, to spearheading international gatherings and campaigns that seek to impact everyone from government leaders to a husband and wife in their home.

Through all these activities a new vision has emerged: that life for women can be different, that men and women can form healthy relationships without violence, that communities ought to take responsibility for eradicating violence from their midst, and that governments have a fundamental obligation to protect their citizens from such abuse, without discrimination of any kind.

One of the most significant aspects of this work has been the demand that violence against women be recognized as a fundamental violation of their human rights. By placing gender-based violence in a human rights framework, advocates have been able to put pressure on governments to fulfil their obligations under international law to punish and prevent such violence. In response, governments have introduced new legislation and strengthened old laws, making domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, FGM, trafficking and other forms of violence against women criminal offences. As of this writing, forty-five nations have laws that explicitly prohibit domestic violence and twenty-one more are drafting new laws to do so, while in many others criminal assault laws have been amended to cover domestic violence. As of 2000, 118 countries had developed national action plans to implement their commitments to the Platform for Action produced by the Fourth

World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), which called for countries to develop plans that would combat violence against women.⁷

Much of this work is built on a foundation of international standards and policy recommendations such as the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) and the Beijing Platform for Action, both of which emerged from global negotiating processes and therefore have been agreed to by virtually all the world's governments. The UN has also designated 25 November as International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, a day that had already become a rallying point for millions of individuals and groups working together throughout the world. These standards and policies, combined with the increased attention they have brought to the issue, have led to significant advances in bringing the judiciary, law enforcement and health professionals into efforts to address violence against women.

Innovative measures such as women's police stations and 'one-stop' crisis centres that offer medical care, legal and psychological counselling, education services and job referrals all in one setting are being established in various countries. Meanwhile, advances in research are slowly improving documentation of the incidence and extent of violence and its costs to society. It is no small feat that people are beginning to think that violence against women is not 'normal' or acceptable after all. For more women to come forward and demand justice, for more governments to recognize that violence against women is not cultural but criminal, for more survivors to receive support and to realize that they are not to blame for the vicious attacks they have suffered, represents enormous progress.

UNIFEM and Violence Against Women

As an international organization UNIFEM has been a close partner in global efforts to raise the visibility of violence against women. In 1992 we published *Battered Dreams: Violence Against Women as an Obstacle to Development*.⁸ Up to that time, development agencies had considered gender-based violence to be outside their scope of work. Since then, UNIFEM has extended its advocacy and networking, promoted awareness and public education, and continued funding innovative projects organized by our many partners in nearly every region of the world. In 2000, we published a report on lessons learned from some of these efforts: *With an End in Sight: Strategies from the UNIFEM Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence Against Women*.⁹ The Trust Fund, begun in 1996, seeks out and supports innovative, often experimental projects that are just getting off the ground. It gives them the financial boost they need, as well as knowledge acquired from other initiatives we have funded, to help them grow and eventually reach out to other interested donors.

Our work in helping to pass Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) and our ongoing work in the field highlighted an issue that had been ignored for too long: the brutal violence against women that has become the norm in wars and internal conflicts all over the world, as well as the manner in which women and their concerns are ignored once peace negotiations begin. In 2001, UNIFEM commissioned two

international experts, Elisabeth Rehn of Finland and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, to visit conflict sites in various regions, meet with women, report on women's experience of violence and provide recommendations for improving women's safety during conflict. We published the results of their ground-breaking investigations in 2002 under the title *Women, War, Peace* and continue to advocate for increased recognition of the needs of women in war zones.

In 2002, as part of our effort to further document and analyse work in the field, we commissioned a series of regional scans by outside experts to assess the nature and extent of violence against women in each region, as well as the efforts made to combat it. This report builds on information gathered in those scans, particularly as they shed light on many programmes and networks that have not received recognition outside their own sphere. But the regional scans also highlighted another area of deep concern to all activists against gender-based violence. The analyses from individual countries and numerous regions all shared a painful paradox. On the one hand, they reaffirmed UNIFEM's own observation that the landscape of gender violence has been transformed: Violence against women is on the public policy agenda, and the human rights framework has become the compass to guide women's efforts. Indeed, it would be hard to find a corner of the world where women's organizations have not demanded some action, whether it be prodding governments and institutions to live up to their commitments, questioning traditional roles, collecting stories of abuse or denouncing victimization. On the other hand, as these activities have unfolded, rather than there being a dramatic reduction in violence against women, the scans show that the challenges have become more complex, the resistance to change deeper, the backlash against the empowerment of women more blatant and the methods used to uphold the status quo more sophisticated and insidious.

None of this should be surprising. Violence against women is too complex, takes too many forms and intersects with too many other issues for it to be eradicated without a long struggle. It is ingrained in the structure of power relations between women and men and it is bound up in traditional gendered roles and expectations. As a group, women often lack access to the power structures, the law, the resources and the education that would equip them to put an end to violence. And even when they do have the capacity to stop individual cases of violence, these instances are exceptions and not the norm. Thus, the goal of this report is to understand the effect of the changes women have wrought and to see where to direct our energies in the future and how to shape the next stage of the work. The difficulties of the current era can only strengthen the resolve to build a better world for women and for the children, men and other women who love and depend on them.

Investing in Ending Violence Against Women

UNIFEM's documentation of the years of work by activists and other organizations, as well as our own work, has shown that the kind of change needed requires a coordinated and sustained effort on many levels. A review of the most promising strategies shows that they incorporate international commitments and obligations, utilize regional organizations and mecha-

nisms where available, demand national commitments, involve local communities and include and inspire those working for change at the grass-roots level. These interwoven connections require strategies that are also linked, bringing together awareness-raising, legal change, national plans of action and research.

One of the most remarkable things about the effort so far is how much has been achieved with so little financial investment. But that is no longer enough. Significant resources and a long-term commitment are needed to bring these promising beginnings to a new level. Unfortunately, the resources to achieve the blueprint outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the national action plans formulated in its aftermath have not been made available. Governments, foundations, businesses and other institutions continue to rely on countless overworked and understaffed women's organizations, still the main actors in the struggle for the rights of women and for the elimination of gender-based violence. Greater investment is clearly needed.

There are some promising signs as financial institutions and the private sector explore new strategies. The Inter-American Development Bank, for example, has begun to provide loans to countries interested in increasing their citizens' security. Chile, the Dominican Republic, Panama and Uruguay are among the countries that have signed for loans, and have committed part of the funds to activate national plans that include gender-based violence as an important component.

Some actors in the private sector have also begun to pay attention to the problem of violence against women, especially corporations whose products are traditionally associated with women. Several have underwritten initiatives aimed at raising public awareness. The Body Shop, an international cosmetics and body care company, for example, supports projects combating violence against women, as does the US-based Liz Claiborne Corporation.

But the scale of the problem vastly exceeds these modest beginnings. Too many governments have made commitments, established legal frameworks and created policies and action plans to end violence, yet have not lived up to these commitments. Too often, they have provided neither the training nor the resources necessary to implement programmes. And as governments face budgetary crises and diminishing resources, the question of investing in ending violence against women becomes even more acute — particularly when security and military concerns overpower national budgets. Ultimately, the question is not about scarcity but about the allocation of existing resources.

Clearly, much more than money is needed. There must also be investments in training and awareness-building. Gender-based violence has been identified as the product of learned behaviour in societies structured around dynamics of power and domination. As such, it can be changed, particularly through education targeted at children, youth of both sexes and women themselves. A number of studies emphasize the correlation between women's education and their ability to protect themselves from gender-based violence. Armed with this knowledge, UNICEF, for example, has made girls' education a cornerstone of its work on the elimination of gender-based violence. Investment in

UNIFEM and Its Partnerships to End Violence Against Women

In 1992, at a time when the international community was still reluctant to view violence against women as a public — rather than a private — matter, UNIFEM sought to position the issue as a priority for development agencies with the publication of *Battered Dreams: Violence Against Women as an Obstacle to Development*. The following year UNIFEM supported a broad coalition of hundreds of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to launch the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights, which spearheaded efforts to bring the issue before the UN World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna 1993).

UNIFEM was also active at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) where 189 governments agreed that violence against women “both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.”¹⁰

UNIFEM's role in eradicating violence against women was strengthened in 1996 when the UN General Assembly created the Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women, based at UNIFEM. The Trust Fund is an important element of UNIFEM's efforts to end gender-based violence, allowing the organization to support innovative projects, primarily at the local and national levels. The Trust Fund focuses on helping new projects get off the ground and move up to more diverse funding. Over the years, many NGOs supported by UNIFEM have developed important pilot programmes that have served as models for larger efforts.

The Trust Fund has granted over US\$7 million to community-based, national and regional organizations, in more than 80 countries, that are working to end violence against women (see Appendix 3). But demand for support far exceeds the available resources: With only about US\$1 million per year to distribute, the Trust Fund receives, on average, requests for support of US\$15 million annually.

In 1997, UNIFEM formed partnerships with a number of other UN agencies — including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) — to launch the first regional inter-agency campaigns on ending violence against women, which could coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This collaboration brought about the first global videoconference on ending violence against women. Thousands of women and men watched from every corner of the world as women stood up in the UN General Assembly Hall and described the violence they had experienced and their efforts to end it.

Since 1997, UNIFEM has invested an additional US\$18 million in anti-violence programming including the US\$7 million in Trust Fund grants. All these initiatives, which involved collaborations with many NGOs, governments and UN agencies, have had significant results, including the adoption of new legislation, expanded political will and increased local and national capacity to address violence.¹¹

women's education continues to be one of the most strategic ways of using development resources, as emphasized in the Millennium Development Goals adopted by UN Member States in 2000, which provide a shared vision of development over the next decades.

Although completely integrated efforts to achieve these ends are not yet the norm, many important partnerships have been formed in recent years that serve as a model for the larger effort. At UNIFEM we have set a goal of fostering stronger partnerships

between the women's groups we work with and governments and international agencies that have resources. As groups link with national and regional organizations, we all benefit from shared skills and strategies. The need for ongoing collaboration to bring all sectors into the effort is a pressing issue in work to end violence.

Moving to the Next Level

Women and the world are at a crossroads. We can move forward towards greater peace and security for women and men and the communities they live in. Or we can go backwards towards lives marred by alienation, extremism and violence. There are no hard and fast rules for victory and it is easy in the face of continuing violence to give in to despair, to wonder if anything can stop the onslaught. In this report, UNIFEM will describe the work that has been done, work that we have been committed to for over a decade, and show that the campaign to end violence against women has reached a new stage, thanks to the effort and the willingness of women to take risks. There is still a long way to go, and on the scale of centuries — the scale on which gender inequality and the violence it leads to must be measured — the work has just begun. But women do not have centuries to wait. And in fact the tide has begun to turn in a mere fraction of that time. For despite lapses in implementation and sizable gaps in resources and remedies available to all women, it is undeniable that progress has been made.

This report will show the many partnerships and collaborations that are already addressing violence against women in a multi-sectoral, broad-based manner. Efforts in these areas must be expanded while new initiatives are put in place. Ultimately, success will depend on the ability of advocates to convey a shared vision of a world free of violence as a hope and a possibility. The issues that are at stake are ones of life and death, for women and for communities. This sense of urgency was conveyed to us time and again by women who have been interviewed over the years through various UNIFEM projects and by the researchers who conducted our 2002 regional scans. Women are not safe, they told us, not in the streets, not in schools, not at work, not even in their homes, the place where they should feel the safest.

It is up to actors both large and small to make women safe. But the primary onus is on nations to take up the challenge before them and treat violence against women as the global pandemic that it is. Otherwise, the progress women have achieved cannot be sustained. This effort will require a political commitment equal to that used to halt devastating illnesses such as smallpox or polio. It will require the kind of sustained effort that went into changing behaviour and social attitudes as diverse as smoking and foot binding. Ending violence against women must be no less important. It is the most universal and unpunished crime of all. Success will offer a new perspective for international cooperation, more equitable development and a deeper commitment to human rights. It will give women the ability to live their lives in freedom and dignity.