


# **A Life Free of Violence:**

Unleashing the Power of Women's  
Empowerment and Gender Equality

**UNIFEM Strategy 2008-2013**



*Ending violence against women is at the heart of the mandate of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). The international community has an unprecedented opportunity to make meaningful progress in tackling this universal human rights violation. Within this context, UNIFEM has developed its Strategy 2008-2013 to end violence against women and girls, an overview of which is presented here. The complete version can be found at: [www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/violence\\_against\\_women](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women)*

# A Life Free of Violence

Violence against women and girls is a global pandemic of alarming proportions. No country is free of the scourge, no socio-economic class is exempt from its destructive effects. It takes place within homes, on the streets, in schools, workplaces and refugee camps, and is prevalent whether in times of peace or during crises and conflicts. Its many forms include domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse, trafficking and sexual exploitation, femicide, and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting. Gender-based violence impoverishes and harms not only women and girls, but also communities and societies as a whole.

## Worldwide problem

Decades of tireless efforts and dedication by the women's movement and concerned human rights activists across the world have placed the issue of gender-based violence high on global, regional and national policy-making agendas. No longer relegated as only a women's issue, violence against women is now recognized as a priority for achieving poverty reduction, development, peace and security.

A record number of countries have adopted laws, policies and action plans to address this problem. The international political momentum has accelerated, with the United Nations Secretary-General launching the **UNiTE to End Violence against Women** campaign in 2008. Lasting through 2015, the UNiTE Campaign recognizes the importance of ending violence against women to realize the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

## UNIFEM's role

Ending violence against women and girls is a core part of UNIFEM's history and mandate and one of its four thematic priorities for the period 2008 -2013. UNIFEM's role as the United Nations women's fund includes advocacy, building partnerships and developing innovative approaches to respond to violence against women and girls in a wide range of countries and supporting the United Nations system-wide response to gender-based violence. Further progress will require mobilizing those with power at all levels, public and private; building multisectoral partnerships; investing in capacity development; expanding the knowledge base on effective approaches; and securing the necessary human, technical and financial resources.

*Worldwide, between 15 and 76 percent of women are targeted for physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, according to the available country data. Most of this violence takes place within intimate relationships, with many women (ranging from 9 to 70 percent) reporting their husbands or partners as the perpetrator.<sup>1</sup>*

A central tenet of UNIFEM's work is to ensure that the United Nations system and United Nations Country Teams are able to deliver as one in response to national priorities for ending violence against women. UNIFEM leads or participates in joint United Nations programmes to end violence against women at country level, and plays a key role in global and regional inter-agency initiatives that increase the UN's responsiveness and resources to address this global pandemic.

In the context of United Nations reform, UNIFEM's strategy for addressing violence against women and girls, 2008 – 2013, seeks to translate existing commitments into realities. Rooted in **guiding principles**, the strategy focuses on **four key areas** and **six cross-cutting strategies**. Its emphasis is on promoting local-level action—where it matters most for the lives of women and girls.

## Guiding Principles

All UNIFEM-supported initiatives are rooted in the human rights of women and girls and the promotion of gender equality, while ensuring cultural relevance. The fundamental principles guiding UNIFEM's work on ending violence against women and girls include:

***Promoting human rights, women's empowerment and gender equality:***

Gender-based violence is rooted in inequality and discrimination. Women need equal access to resources and opportunities so that they can control their choices and destinies—including avoidance of and escape from abusive relationships and situations.

***Focusing on poverty and excluded groups:***

While violence affects women and girls of all social and economic strata, the poor and excluded often face higher risks of abuse, have fewer avenues of escape and find it more difficult to gain access to health care, police, legal and social services. UNIFEM prioritizes interventions in impoverished areas and communities, and among especially neglected groups of women and girls.

# Four Key Areas

## 1. FULFILLING THE PROMISE

### Implementing national commitments

While progress in many countries in adopting national laws and policies is encouraging, the norm remains impunity. Too many of those responsible for gender-based violence are not brought to justice, and many women lack access to the support and resources they need to rebuild their lives. UNIFEM supports countries to implement laws and policies, in particular through:

- *National and local action plans to end violence against women and girls* that reflect a comprehensive and multi-stakeholder approach to both prevention and response, bringing in all relevant government and civil society actors;
- *Multisectoral referral systems for the victims/survivors* of violence that include frontline responders—the police, health care professionals, legal aid workers and the judiciary;
- *Minimum standards* that all countries should have in place, such as ready access to 24-hour emergency hotlines, prompt police protection, shelters and safe housing, and universal access to post-rape care and free medical and legal aid;
- *Strengthening of key institutions* that play a central role in the coordination and monitoring of national and local action plans, policies and laws;
- *Data collection and analysis* that form the basis for policy and legal reforms, performance improvements, service delivery, advocacy and outreach. This includes efforts to harmonize data collection and indicators, both within and across countries.

### New ways of working

UNIFEM galvanizes attention and resources around emerging and strategic areas of work—those that can catalyse and accelerate progress. This includes:

- Incorporating institutional responses to violence against women and girls into *leading national development and funding frameworks*, such as poverty reduction strategies, peace-building and reconstruction, HIV and AIDS plans and sector-wide reforms in education, health, the judicial system and the security sector;
- Using *gender-responsive budgeting* to secure the required level of political will and public resources and to track allocations and spending;
- Mobilizing more attention and resources for *prevention*, especially working with strategic groups such as young people and men.

### Global Virtual Knowledge Centre — [www.endvawnow.org](http://www.endvawnow.org)

*UNIFEM has developed a one-stop on-line centre to support practitioners around the world in designing, implementing and evaluating policies and programmes. Working closely with leading experts and organizations in the field, the site brings together state-of-the-art know-how based on recommended practice from around the world. With a fully searchable database of implementation tools and specialized organizations, the site provides practical guidance in three languages (English, Spanish, French) on:*

- *how to work with specific sectors, groups or areas of intervention;*
- *training and other practical tools for implementation;*
- *key sources of data and other on-line resources; and*
- *proven and promising approaches and initiatives.*

## 2. UPHOLDING THE STANDARDS

### Aligning policies and laws with human rights

In many countries, the legal and policy framework to address violence against women and girls falls short of international and regional human rights standards. Building on its years of leadership on the human rights of women, UNIFEM provides technical, advocacy and financial support to:

- *Promote comprehensive legal reforms* that address all forms of violence against women and eliminate outdated and harmful provisions that perpetuate impunity;
- Enhance *formal and informal justice systems*, by working with judges and lawyers as well as traditional leaders and village elders on the protection of women's human rights;

- Support *national follow-up on human rights recommendations*, including those of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;
- Institute *protocols and regulations* that safeguard the human rights of women survivors of violence, and monitor their compliance;
- Advance *monitoring and accountability mechanisms* to track responses to violence against women at global, regional and national levels and promote alignment with human rights obligations and standards.

*The United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) is a leading global multi-lateral mechanism exclusively devoted to supporting country level action to end violence against women and girls. Established by the General Assembly in 1996, UNIFEM manages the UN Trust Fund on behalf of the United Nations system, channeling expertise, resources and facilitating synergies with other United Nations initiatives to bolster national implementation.*

### 3. ADDRESSING RAPE IN WAR

#### Responding to sexual violence during and after conflict

Sexual violence is widely used in conflicts to force population flight, undermine community cohesion and demoralize the enemy. Resources for survivors of such violence are grossly insufficient, tactics for prevention by peacekeepers and other security personnel are inadequate and the issue is rarely mentioned in peace accords. Building on its pivotal role in promoting the adoption of landmark Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), UNIFEM's work to address sexual violence in conflict, post-conflict and unstable situations includes:

- Supporting the *capacities of women's rights advocates and women's machineries* to implement Security Council resolutions on the issue;
- Supporting *women's organizations* that assist and empower women survivors and working with communities to reduce stigma and facilitate socio-economic reintegration;

- Promoting *women's engagement* in peace negotiations, transitional justice mechanisms and post-conflict reconstruction plans;

*UNIFEM is a founding member of Stop Rape Now, UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict and it has been at the forefront of building global commitment to address sexual violence in conflict, and recognize it as a crime against humanity and a tactic of warfare.*

- Developing the capacities of the *security sector* in prevention, protection and investigation, including through training and instituting new performance standards and accountability measures;
- Strengthening *the rule of law*, at international, regional and national levels, through sustained advocacy and technical assistance on sexual violence as a crime against humanity;
- Developing *community-based strategies* of prevention and protection from sexual violence;
- Calling for investment in developing and deploying *rapid response mechanisms* in emergencies to avert or promptly address sudden increases in sexual violence.

*'It is perhaps more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict.'*

Major General (ret.) Patrick Cammaert, former UN Division Commander for Eastern DRC (MONUC)

## 4. WITH AN END IN SIGHT

### Focusing on prevention to stop the violence

Although work on prevention has suffered from decades of political neglect and underfunding, developing models and programmes to stop violence from occurring in the first place is the most strategic (and cost-effective) medium-to-longer-term strategy. Investing in primary prevention of violence against women and girls is the only way to achieve violence-free future generations.

#### Best bet: Working with young people

Focusing on young people—especially adolescent girls and boys from the ages of 10 to 19—is crucial to foster positive attitudes towards gender equality and to instill zero tolerance for violence against women and girls. It is at this stage of life that values and norms about gender equality are embedded.

Working with adolescents—both girls and boys—therefore presents an invaluable opportunity to cultivate generations in which violence against women is no longer commonplace or tolerated.

UNIFEM supports:

- *Outreach strategies to engage young women and men* as champions of social transformation, including through the use of popular entertainment, music and internet technologies, as well as school systems;

- Efforts to *empower young women and strengthen youth mobilization and leadership*, recognizing the rights of young people to participate in decisions affecting their lives;
- *Policy-oriented advocacy* on prevention among this key age group, and to ensure that young women survivors of gender-based violence have ready access to information, services and responses tailored to their needs;
- Catalyzing action on *sexual violence against adolescent girls and young women* – a particularly neglected but urgent issue.

*‘Change starts with young people... It is in adolescence and youth ...that people learn what is and what is not acceptable.’*

Prateek Suman Awasthi, youth leader, launch of the Secretary-General’s campaign to End Violence against Women, 2008

#### Essential allies: Men and boys

Ending violence against women and girls ultimately requires that men of all ages stand up against it, both publicly and in their private lives. UNIFEM will be working with key partners and networks on:

- Intensifying *advocacy and outreach initiatives* in the framework of the Secretary-General’s campaign **UNiTE to End Violence against Women**;
- Strengthening *partnerships with pro-gender equality men’s groups and networks*; and,
- Enhancing *existing programmes* by integrating expertise on masculinity issues in order to promote and adapt promising prevention approaches.



### **‘Twin pandemics’: Violence against women and HIV/AIDS**

Violence against women has been a silent but potent culprit in the feminization of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. It is both a consequence and a cause of HIV. Developing effective ‘dual prevention’ approaches to the twin pandemics—HIV and violence against women—is essential. UNIFEM is well placed, with its ongoing work and links to projects funded by the UN Trust Fund, to enhance the knowledge base and guide programmes on how to address the linkages between these issues.

### **‘Going Global’ on Safe Cities: Violence against women and girls in public spaces**

In various cities around the world, UNIFEM is tackling the sexual harassment and violence that women experience in their daily lives on city streets, transportation and in other public spaces. While these abuses limit women’s freedom as equal citizens to enjoy the urban environment, and to exercise their rights to education, work, recreation, collective organization and participation in political life—they are ignored by policies and laws. In addition to its ongoing pioneer work in Latin America and start-up efforts in other regions, UNIFEM’s new flagship programme—*Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls, 2008-2014*—is the first cross-regional attempt to develop a model for worldwide adaptation. Rooted in women’s and community empowerment and partnership with local governments, and through the introduction of practical safety measures and policy reforms, the aim is to prevent and reduce such violence, enhancing the quality of city life for all.

*Worldwide, up to 50 percent of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 16.<sup>2</sup>*

*The first sexual experience of some 30 percent of women was forced. The percentage is even higher among those who were under 15 at the time of their sexual initiation, with up to 45 percent reporting that the experience was forced.<sup>3</sup>*

# Cross-cutting Strategies

Central to effective implementation and sustainability of UNIFEM-supported programmes are six interrelated, cross-cutting strategies:

- **Partnership-building**, working with national and local governments, women's groups, other civil society organizations (including human rights, youth, men's and faith-based groups), researchers, the media, the private sector and donors; and contributing to strengthening the United Nations inter-agency mechanisms and partnerships working on ending violence against women and girls;

- **National capacity development**—a lead outcome of all UNIFEM operations—to reinforce the skills, 'know how' and systems of local and national government institutions, women's networks, civil society organizations and other partners;

*'A society that permits violence against women is a society that is on the way out.'*

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, launch of the Network of Men Leaders, Secretary-General's campaign to End Violence against Women, 2009

- **Monitoring and evaluation**, to enhance the reach and quality of programmes and ensure that lessons are learned that can guide policies, programmes and investments around the world;

- **Knowledge-sharing**, to ensure that interventions are based on evidence of 'what works' to address violence against women, and by facilitating access to expert guidance on how to implement effective policies and programmes;

- **Advocacy and communications**, through active involvement in the Secretary-General's campaign, **UNiTE to End Violence against Women**, and coordination of its inter-agency regional components; and expanding work with other partners, including the media, Goodwill Ambassadors and other high-profile spokespersons;

- **Resource mobilization**, through sustained outreach, including a fundraising drive to raise \$100 million annually by 2015 for the UN Trust Fund—a benchmark adopted in the framework of the Secretary-General's campaign to end violence against women.

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1. Figures are based on data from 40 countries obtained through the three leading international surveys on prevalence, with most survey sites reporting between 20 and 60 percent of women having experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. *Adapted from WHO. 2005. WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women: 46.* WHO, Geneva; Johnson, H., N. Ollus and S. Nevala. 2008. *Violence Against Women: An International Perspective: 39.* (International Violence against Women Survey-IVAWS), New York: Springer Science + Business Media and *Demographic and Health Surveys-DHS*, ORC Macro, Calverton, Maryland. [http://www.measuredhs.com/Topics/gender/dv\\_surveys.cfm](http://www.measuredhs.com/Topics/gender/dv_surveys.cfm).
  2. UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). 2003. *UNFPA and Young People: Imagine: 3.* UNFPA, New York.
  3. Figure based on data from population-based surveys in 13 countries and adapted from: WHO. 2005. *WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women: 52.* WHO, Geneva; Uganda Bureau of Statistics and Macro International Inc. 2007. *Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2006: 289.* UBOS and Macro International, Calverton, Maryland; Ukrainian Center for Social Reforms, State Statistical Committee (Ukraine), Ministry of Health (Ukraine) and Macro International Inc. 2008. *Ukraine Demographic and Health Survey 2007: 168.* UCSR and Macro International, Calverton, Maryland; and Central Statistical Office Zimbabwe and Macro International Inc. 2007. *Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey 2005-06: 263.* CSO and Macro International Inc, Calverton, Maryland. Note: age of forced sexual initiation not available for Uganda.

*Ending violence against women and girls is within reach. UNIFEM's vision for a secure and peaceful world is one in which women and girls are free from violence and abuse, free to thrive as equals.*



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