



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

8 March 2009

One year ago, I launched a campaign calling on people and governments the world over to unite to end violence against women and girls. The campaign will run through 2015, the target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The link with the Goals is clear. We must stop the habitual and socially ingrained violence that mars lives, destroys health, perpetuates poverty and prevents us from achieving women's equality and empowerment.

Violence against women is also linked to the spread of HIV/AIDS. In some countries, as many as one in three women will be beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Women and girls are also systematically and deliberately subject to rape and sexual violence in war.

Violence against women stands in direct contradiction to the promise of the United Nations Charter to "promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom." The consequences go beyond the visible and immediate. Death, injury, medical costs and lost employment are but the tip of an iceberg. The impact on women and girls, their families, their communities and their societies in terms of shattered lives and livelihoods is beyond calculation. Far too often, crimes go unpunished, and perpetrators walk free. No country, no culture, no woman, young or old, is immune.

Increasingly, men, too, are speaking out against this stain on our society. Global examples include the White Ribbon Campaign and the V-Day Campaign's "V-Men" counterpart. And at community workshops, men are teaching other men that there is another way and that "real men don't hit women."

Changing mindsets and the habits of generations is not easy. It must involve all of us — individuals, organizations and governments. We must work together to state loud and clear, at the highest level, that violence against women will not be tolerated, in any form, in any context, in any circumstance.

We need economic and social policies that support women's empowerment. We need programmes and budgets that promote non-violence. We need a positive image of women in the media. We need laws that say violence is a crime, that hold perpetrators accountable and are enforced.

The "Unite to End Violence against Women" campaign encourages men and women to join hands to oppose violence against women. Only by acting together can we create more equal and peaceful societies. Let us all, on this International Women's Day, resolve to make a difference.