

**Statement by Ms. Aisa Kacyira, Assistant Secretary General and Deputy
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at the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

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Ms. Chairperson, Honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates and colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

UN-HABITAT is grateful to the Commission for its focus this year on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls. As the lead UN Agency for promoting socially and environmentally sustainable cities and towns with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all, and the focal point for monitoring progress in the attainment of the Habitat Agenda. We believe that to achieve this goal we need to provide a platform for contributing to more equitable, socially sustainable and economically just urban development for women and girls, not to mention peace and security.

Ms. Chairperson,

Today, just over half the world's people live in urban areas, and we expect the percentage of urban dwellers to rise to 70 per cent by 2050. The number of urban dwellers is expected to triple in Africa and double in Asia. Cities and towns are experiencing rapid transformations as a result of the economic, social, cultural, technological and communications shifts that urbanization processes bring with them, including changing patterns of social behavior and interaction.¹ This includes rising insecurity: over a period of five years, 60 to 70 per cent of all urban residents in developing countries have been victims of crime. The urban poor are more exposed to crime and violence than the rich, and since women make up the majority of the urban poor they are more exposed to risk.

Across the world, in both developing and developed countries, women and girls experience various forms of gender-based violence in both private and public life. Whether on city streets, public spaces and public transportation or in their own neighborhoods, women and girls are subjected to various types of violence and abuse — from sexual harassment, both physical and verbal, to sexual assault and rape. Such daily occurrences limit the rights and freedoms of women as equal citizens to enjoy their neighborhoods and cities, and to exercise their rights to mobility, education, work, recreation, collective organization and participation in social, economic and political life, a case in point is the horrific rape and death of the young woman in Delhi and just recently of a young woman in South Africa. Women's safety and the '*right to the city*' are inextricably linked. Women's lack of safety is a serious obstacle to achieving gender equality and sustainable urban development.

¹ Falú, Ana 2000, "Local and Global The New Paradigm of the Post Modern City", in Carmona, Drew, Roseman & van Duijn, ed, *Globalization, Urban Form & Governane, First International Conference*, Delft Univeristy Press pp 141-154

Whereas domestic violence is now widely recognized, violence against women in public spaces remains a largely neglected issue, with few laws or policies in place to address it. Women not only perceive and experience cities differently than men, but they also use public spaces in different ways. The use of public spaces, by sex, age and other factors, also fluctuates at different times of the day, and at different times of the year. In the urban design, planning, management and governance of cities, neighbourhoods, public spaces and transport initiatives, the gender specificity is often ignored and the failure to address this has created major impediments to gender equality and sustainable urban development. In addition, women and girls feelings of fear should be carefully considered as this inhibits or promotes their democratic rights to use public spaces.

Safety from violence is more than a policing issue. Local authorities and urban planners may be aware of violence against women in both the public and private spheres, but often do not appreciate the role they themselves can play in tackling the issue. There is a great need to address violence in public spaces taking a gendered approach and to understand the role urban design, planning and management can play in minimizing risks as well as changing perceptions of insecurity. To support local initiatives and programmes, we need to support the development of national urban policies which should provide the institutional legal framework for addressing women and girls safety in the existing borders of cities and towns, but also in the pro-active planning of city extensions.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is the most widespread form of abuse worldwide, affecting one third of all women in their lifetime. Addressing violence against women and girls is a central development goal in its own right, and key to achieving other development outcomes for individual women, their families, communities and nations. “Discrimination and violence destroys the potential of girls and women in developing countries and prevents them from pulling themselves out of poverty.”²

Eliminating violence against women is inseparable from achieving equality for women. One in three women will be raped, beaten, coerced into sex or abused in her lifetime - and in conflicts, [and crisis] the situation is exacerbated.³

Women are victims of unbelievably horrific atrocities and injustices in conflict and crisis situations; this is indisputable. As refugees, internally displaced persons, combatants, heads of household and community leaders, as activists and peace-builders, women and men experience conflict and crisis differently. Women rarely have the same resources, political rights, authority or control over their environment and needs that men do. In addition, their caretaking responsibilities limit their mobility and ability to protect themselves.

² Andrew Mitchell, International Development Secretary, International Women's Day, 8 March 2012

³ Action Aid report 2011

Ms. Chairperson,

On the whole, governments and policy makers are still responding inadequately to different gender needs in towns and cities. With time, this deepens the disadvantages for women and girls. It denies them an equal voice to bring about improvements in their communities, and holds back the full potential for social and economic development in their cities and towns.

With global threats such as climate change and global recession, never has there been a greater urgency to develop innovative interventions. Still, there is also substantial progress on improving gender equality in cities and local governance. This goes to show that strategic and targeted programmes and activities can, indeed, advance both gender equality and sustainable urbanization in mutually reinforcing ways. In this respect, UN-Habitat stands at the forefront of initiatives to sustain past gains and future momentum—with strong support and political will from governments and fruitful cooperation with other United Nations agencies (such as UN Women, UNICEF, UNODC and UNDP), civil society, central and local governments and the private sector.

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

We ask the Commission on the Status of Women, all governments, women's organizations, regional and international organizations present, to ensure:

1. women's full participation in the urban planning, management and governance of cities and towns;
2. improving policies and programmes targeting victims of disasters and conflicts taking into account how gender affects women and men differently in crisis;
3. mainstreaming of gender issues in the design and implementation of urban planning programmes so as to bring wide social and economic benefits to women and their communities;
4. effective government reform around land and property to provide pro-poor, gender-responsive policies and programmes that ensure that women's rights to land and property are not undermined by social norms and traditional practices that discriminate against women;
5. continued support to local authorities that are working with community groups, including women's networks, to improve safety and security through greater gender-sensitivity in urban planning and design.

Thank you for your kind attention.