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*Presentation by
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at the

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SESSION ON: THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND
INTERNATIONAL LAW

Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to acknowledge, like others who have spoken earlier, the timeliness of this conference and to extend my gratitude to the government of Italy and in particular Minister Carfagna for using their presidency of the G8 countries to highlight the scourge of violence against women. This conference provides another opportunity to underscore what has been stated on many occasions, including in the Secretary-General's study: Ending Violence Against Women: From Words to Action that "the continuing pervasive violence against women across the globe fuels a culture of violence and undermines progress towards the goals of human rights, development and peace".

Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although organizations within the United Nations system are the first to come to mind when we speak of International Organizations, the term refers to a plethora of organizations, intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental, whose origin may be local, national, regional or global but whose outreach is "international". These organizations may be found in all countries, developed, developing, middle-income, countries in transition, those in or emerging from conflict, and so on.

What drives international organizations is their conviction in the worth of the human person and their faith in human rights and fundamental freedoms. The work of international organizations to eradicate violence against women is founded in the

recognition that the persistence of this scourge reflects fundamental gender inequalities in society and that efforts must be made to effectively address discrimination by prioritizing gender equality and empowerment of women. Therefore international organizations working on violence against women are guided by the body of international law, international human rights law, international humanitarian law, international legal norms and principles all of which constitute the international legal framework within which they operate.

Some of the most important foundations on which international organizations' work is based include policy documents demanding gender equality and women's empowerment, especially the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference of Women at Beijing in 1995, but top level executive commitments as well, such as the 2005 World Summit Outcome. The former set out a broad global framework for gender equality and empowerment of women. It acknowledged that empowerment of women and equality between women and men remained prerequisites for the achievement of political, social, economic and environmental security among all peoples. It identified twelve critical areas of concern and called upon governments, the international community, civil society including non-governmental organizations and the private sector to take strategic action. One of the twelve critical areas of concern is violence against women.

Ten years later, Heads of State and Government adopted the 2005 World Summit Outcome in which they reaffirmed the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that "progress for women is progress for all." They resolved to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive gender discrimination, by inter alia, "eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and the girl child, including by ending impunity and by ensuring the protection of civilians in particular women and the girl child during and after armed conflicts in accordance with the obligations of States under international human rights law."

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women also underscored the fact that violence against women is a human rights issue. Today, there is no question that violence against women constitutes discrimination against women and is a violation of the rights of women.

Within this and other frameworks, international organizations have advocated for the adoption of resolutions, declarations, and agreed conclusions, to name a few to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women. The United Nations, has, for example, designated special days and convened special review sessions to ensure that Member States commit to the protection of women's rights. To advance global awareness and activism on the issues, international organizations have utilized designated days to rally international action. For example, 8 March, which is designated as International Women's Day has been utilized by the United Nations system to draw attention to issues pertaining to gender equality, women's empowerment and women's rights. The theme for the commemoration of 8 March in the past two years has been the elimination of violence against women and girls. The 25th November, which has been designated by the

United Nations as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women also provides opportunity for specific focus on progress and constraints in addressing this scourge. International days have thus annually galvanized Member States, civil society organizations and UN entities to intensify actions towards elimination of violence against women.

The convening power of the United Nations has been applied to both advocate and sensitize the world to the persisting gender inequality, violation of women's rights and violence against women and girls. During the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, issues of gender equality and women's empowerment are included on the agenda. Not only are Member States kept seized of the issues, but numerous side events highlight real life situations to demonstrate the urgency for action.

Distinguished Ministers,
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Since 2000, the Security Council, as the organ of the United Nations that has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security has provided a new and potent opportunity to address violence against women, women's participation in decision-making on peace and security and women's rights issues in conflict situations. The adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequently, 1820 (2008) signaled to the international community the Council's acknowledgement that the persistent violation of women's and girls rights during conflict poses a threat to international peace and security. The Security Council's active engagement with this issue raised the fight to end violence against women and girls to a new heightened level.

In addition to these, international organizations have also provided to Member States training, capacity development and a variety of direct services to support victims of violence and to help to develop national institutions to be better positioned to address this scourge.

By providing a platform for sharing ideas and developing consensus, and through the establishment of appropriate monitoring mechanisms, international organizations have provided Member States with opportunities to pay attention to emerging issues, to share ideas on strategies that work at the national and community levels and on best practices.

Distinguished Ministers,
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In order for the international organizations to achieve real success in addressing violence against women, there must be implementation: of policies, of laws, and of commitments. The United Nations has been at the forefront in pushing for implementation. Periodic reviews of different policy commitments have been employed

to determine the extent of implementation and prompt renewed commitment to move forward. These have also served as fora for exchange of good practice ideas, support mechanisms and identification of challenges encountered.

While these actions and many others by international organizations have helped keep the issues of violence against women on the international development agenda, thus helping to spur action at the national and community levels, the implementation of international law and agreements reached at major international meetings require action by Member States at the national level. In essence, international organizations provide fertile forums for developing and advancing international law, and ensuring continued advocacy on the issues. The enactment and enforcement of national laws to support internationally agreed commitments remains with Member States.

The United Nations has identified this area to be one in which Member States are lagging. The development and implementation of national legislation to address and punish all forms of violence against women and girls is therefore one of the five outcomes targeted by the Secretary General's campaign – "UniTE to End Violence against Women."

Distinguished Ministers,
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The work of international organizations cannot replace the actual development and implementation of national laws that hold perpetrators accountable and that protect women and girls from violence. Without appropriate national laws and their effective enforcement, the effect of international agreements and international law will be muted and of little relevance. It is the translation of international commitments into national legal mechanisms and laws and their implementation and enforcement that will move us from words to action. The arm of international law is too short to ensure this at the national level. This is the role of Member States.

Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

What can you do as policy makers to transform this? Let me share a few ideas with you.

First, it is important that intensive efforts are made to develop appropriate laws and enforce those that have already been enacted. I know that this is an area of attention that has been harped upon repeatedly. I also know that the development and adoption of new legislation is not without its difficulties and challenges. The process can be long and arduous and requires real commitment to the cause to get the new law to come into existence. However, this is an area of implementation that cannot wait or be set aside because of lack of political will.

Second, it is important for Member States to support the Secretary-General's Campaign, UNITE to End Violence against Women and, in particular, to contribute to the database on existing legislation to address the issue. This allows for a true assessment of progress made and persistent challenges.

Third, legislation must be backed by appropriate and adequate resources. Governments must lead policy makers to provide, within national budgets, services to women and girls to protect them and their human rights and freedoms.

To successfully transform the national legal framework for addressing violence against women, an enabling national environment is required. In this regard:

- Policies that promote and encourage the participation of men and boys in the elimination of violence against women must be adopted.
- Consideration must be given to rethinking the approach to education in order to transform educational curricula to eliminate stereotypical presentations and violence.
- Above all, consideration must be given to establishing a mechanism for holding actors accountable for the implementation of policies and enforcement of laws.

The G-8 has taken on an important role by championing this cause in this meeting. It should continue to provide leadership by maintaining the issues on its own agenda and on the global agenda as well.