

8 March 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
on “Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women and Girls”**

The right to live without fear of violence, the right to seek equal justice, equal dignity, without discrimination, is a basic human right for all people, including women and girls.

These principles are set out in the United Nations Charter and incorporated in many national constitutions. However criminal impunity of violence against women and girls continues to be commonplace. This is in spite of its inherent contradiction of the principles of international justice.

In order to allow women to enjoy their full human rights and uphold their dignity, we need strong interventions now, to immediately prohibit and delegitimize such acts.

All of us gathered here today are guardians of these rights - we have a moral and political duty to uphold them.

Criminal impunity must end. Every crime must be prosecuted.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the Charter was being signed, Eleanor Roosevelt said that universal human rights begin in small places, close to home.

Most violence against women and girls happens at home - not only physical, but sexual and psychological violence too.

To change attitudes, to prevent and prosecute violence against women and girls, we need to begin in the home.

Domestic violence used to be considered a "private matter", a family issue; this is no longer acceptable!

NGOs have played an important role to raise the level of awareness of women's legal rights. They have encouraged women to speak out against any act that undermines their inherent dignity and basic human rights.

A lack of legislation is sometimes used as an excuse. But this is not the major obstacle. Legal authorities often do not take the appropriate action.

The comprehensive study on violence against women issued during 61st Session of the General Assembly, includes strong recommendations for action, that can end the impunity with which these serious crimes are committed.

Urgent action is needed.

The burden is on our shoulders to guarantee peace and security for all women. We should apply the principles of peace-building, not only in times of conflict, but also, to heal the scars of violence that women suffer from in times of peace. And also, to heal the wounds this leaves on society at large.

We must demonstrate, once and for all, that there are no grounds for tolerance, and no tolerable excuses!

I would like to encourage all of you here today, to have an open and frank discussion of the challenges we face.

It is essential that we better understand our differences and benefit from each others' experiences.

Thank you very much for your attention.