

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

52nd Session, 2008

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ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES
New York, 28 February 2008**

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Madam Chairperson, distinguished delegates, representatives of the United Nations and the NGO community.

It is with great pleasure that I address the Commission on the Status of Women for the first time in my capacity as the United Nations, Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequence. Direct dialogue and collaboration among the different UN mandates on women's rights is essential for ensuring that our initiatives contribute towards an integrated and holistic approach for the advancement of women. In this regard, I would like to express my appreciation to the Bureau of the Commission for inviting me to address the 52nd session. I trust that this will be the start of a continued cooperation between my mandate and the CSW.

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly inform the Commission of my recent activities and my plans for next year. Since my appointment as Special Rapporteur, I have undertaken official missions to 15 countries. At the seventh session of the Human Rights Council next month I will report on my country visits to Algeria, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo. My most recent visit was to Saudi Arabia earlier this month, where I received invaluable support and cooperation from the authorities. I will be submitting a report later this year, containing my findings and recommendations. I hope that my recommendations along with those of the CEDAW Committee, which was published following the review in January of Saudi Arabia's initial and second reports on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention, will contribute towards moving forward in enhancing women's rights in that country.

The Human Rights Council special procedures communication procedure, which also applies to the violence against women mandate, is a crucial mechanism at the international level through which women's rights violations across the globe can be brought to the attention of governments for redress. Unlike the complaint mechanisms attached to some treaty bodies, the special procedures mechanism does not require ratification of any convention nor does it require the exhaustion of domestic remedies before a complaint can be submitted. When member states created this mechanism, they equipped it with the flexibility needed to intervene with urgency. I am aware of several cases on which I acted where positive results have been achieved. However, the effectiveness of this mechanism and the protection afforded to victims of violence would benefit from greater use by human rights defenders and victims as is the case for the more conventional mandates such as freedom of expression or torture.

Madam Chairperson,

As a rapporteur, I also prepare annual thematic reports for the Human Rights Council that address key issues with respect to women's rights and violence against women. Last year my report focused on the ways in which culture based discourses and paradigms are used to justify or explain violence against women, thereby reducing the problem to a cultural realm. Such discourses, whether in the form of cultural relativism or cultural essentialism, challenge the primacy of the principle of gender equality and women's human rights and divert attention from the system of gender inequality that underlie the occurrence of systematic violence against women.

In March of this year I will be presenting my report on indicators on violence against women to the Council, a topic that is also among the interests of this Commission. Establishing indicators on violence against women and state response to violence is essential for evaluating State compliance with international obligations to eliminate violence against women. Developing such indicators is also a human rights obligation, linked to the actual content of human rights jurisprudence and the due diligence principle, which calls upon States, among other things, to ensure that interventions designed to combat violence against women are based on accurate empirical data. This necessitates not just the compilation of accurate information, but also that it is produced in the form of indicators that make the data understandable for non-specialist decision-makers and allow for public scrutiny of interventions.

The report suggests three types of indicators for measuring violence against women, namely 'grave violence', 'femicide' (the murder of women), and 'social tolerance'. With respect to grave violence, it is expected that States will move towards increased measurement of all forms of violence against women in order to produce accurate rates of grave violence and enable international comparisons.

Furthermore, in the report, I elaborate a range of indicators measuring State action to eliminate violence against women: They consist of institutional indicators relating to the legal and policy framework on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and process indicators pertaining to women's access to justice and reporting, victims' protection, prevention and training. The proposed indicators are rooted in the human rights obligations of States, notably the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Although considerable work needs to be done to move from proposals to implementation, there are many entry points for internationally comparable indicators on violence against women, which my report points to, and which governments, the United Nations, and civil society should further explore. In this regard, I proposed the creation of an expert working group as a start to develop a technical guidance manual, oversee piloting and capacity building requirements in resource rich and poor contexts. During the March session of the Human Rights Council there will be a number of occasions to discuss these issues with various stake holders. I hope to collaborate with the Commission on the

States of Women as well as other UN entities such as the Statistics Division and the Division for the Advancement of Women on improving the methodology for indicators with the goal of moving towards the adoption of reliable and comparative indicators at national and international levels.

Madam Chairperson,

In closing I would like to refer to my report for the coming year which will address the political economy of women's rights. I am happy to announce that UNFPA and UNIFEM have agreed to support an expert meeting to give direction to this report. My objective in undertaking such an initiative is very much in line with the current theme of the Commission on the Status of Women, i.e. financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women. The political economy approach helps capture the inter-relatedness between the political sphere and the economic sphere and draws attention to the fact that the protection and promotion of human rights is to a large extent dependent on a material basis where women have full and equal access to productive resources, including micro and macro finance.

Advancing the economic, social, and cultural rights of women, in the neo-liberal era, is thus key to their enjoyment of their civil and political rights and their protection from violence and exploitation. The outcomes of the deliberations of the Commission's current session on financing for gender equality will require a renewed commitment not only on the part of governments but the UN system itself to ensure that the institutional framework for women's advancement is strengthened with sufficient funds and authority at the highest level to be able to effectively guide and monitor implementation. In this respect, I would like to refer to the meager funds allocated to national women's machineries in many countries and the disproportionately low budgets allocated for UN entities working on advancement of women.

The proposed post within the UN, at the Under-Secretary- General level, to oversee the system wide initiatives for gender equality is long overdue. Enhancing the institutional framework for women's advancement within the UN will indeed be an indicator of the international community's compliance with their commitments in Beijing and in the MDGs as well as numerous other platforms.

Thank you!