



Check against delivery

**Opening of the 52nd session of the
Commission on the Status of Women**

*Launch of the Secretary-General's campaign
on violence against women*

**Statement of
Thoraya Ahmed Obaid
UNFPA Executive Director**

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Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to join you today for the launch of your campaign, Mr. Secretary-General, to end violence against women. And I am honoured to be speaking on behalf of the UN system. This campaign represents the recognition at the highest level that eliminating violence against women is a priority for the world today.

Women and girls are at risk of violence when carrying out essential daily activities – within their homes, or while walking, taking public transport to work, collecting water or firewood. Demanding the end of violence against women is not about demanding exceptional treatment. It is simply about letting women live in dignity.

The Millennium Development Goals will not be met unless greater attention and resources are devoted to women's empowerment, gender equality, and ending violence against women and girls.

By respecting women's rights and empowering women, we can enrich families, communities and nations. As we fight to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, we must preserve and nurture the human potential of every individual. It is clear that we cannot make poverty history unless we make violence against women history.

This is also true for our health development goals. The health consequences of violence against women are often severe and long-lasting. Violence against women and girls increases the spread of HIV. It also increases maternal and child mortality.

We must pay particular attention to the most vulnerable women of all – to those women living in extreme poverty, in conflict situations and unstable environments. Collectively, we have the responsibility and capacity to tackle this problem.

For millions of women and girls around the world, their visit to a health facility is the only opportunity to get the services and support they need to begin to heal. We must continue our efforts to make public health services available to all women.

Eliminating violence against women also helps us achieve universal primary education. Education enhances knowledge, opportunity, and the enjoyment of life. It must be a priority focus. When women are educated, their health improves, the survival of their children improves, and society improves.

Mr. Chairman,

Violence against women is linked to gender inequalities. By intention or effect, it serves to perpetuate male power and control.

Violence against women has been hidden in a culture of silence. With this campaign, we are breaking the silence and ensuring that women's voices are heard. We need strong and sustained leadership – such as yours, Mr. Secretary-General – to change norms and attitudes. It is time to end complicity and impunity.

We all have a role to play. Men and boys can make a tremendous contribution by using their power for positive change. Together with them, we will create a world where both girls and boys are raised in a culture of mutual respect, responsibility, and equal opportunity.

Together, we can change deeply rooted attitudes and practices that discriminate against women and girls. We can ensure that all those who respond to violence against women—whether they are police officers, judges, lawyers, immigration officials, health personnel, or social workers—are sensitized and trained to provide a response that is compassionate, comprehensive and effective.

Over the years, governments have made progress in bringing national laws into compliance with international standards. They have increased the provision of services to victims. We have seen national campaigns bring results. We have seen politicians, religious leaders, and celebrities denounce violence against women.

In this fight, we pay tribute to the leadership taken by women and civil society. Their efforts have produced enormous change.

Mr. Chairman,

Today, the United Nations as a whole pledges intensified, coordinated, and urgent action to help governments prevent, punish, and eliminate violence against women.

From common to rare, from accepted to unacceptable, from impunity to justice, from suffering to support, we can build a world where violence against women belongs to the past.

More than sixty years ago, the founders of the United Nations reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women. These are the words at the top of our Charter. Today, we are renewing this commitment and we will make it a reality. This is not just an issue for women; it is an issue for everyone.

Thank you.