

UN in The Gambia Joins the Government to Celebrate Women Through Art and Film

The UN System in The Gambia organised a week-long Photo and Art Exhibition and Film Show at the UN House as a contribution to the national activities to commemorate the International Women's Day 2009. The Exhibition attracted massive participation and support from, among others, Senior Government Officials and Development Partners, civil society organizations, law enforcement institutions and schools.

Opening the Exhibition, the Vice President of the Republic of the Gambia, Dr. Aja Isatou Njie Saidy, emphasized the importance of helping the country rise to glory, first by acknowledging the fact that violence against women does exist. The Vice President alluded to the UN Secretary General's message, which states that violence against women is a goal in itself. According to Her Excellency, all role players have no choice but to translate words into action. She reiterated the Government's commitment to making even greater progress.

"I am pleased to, hereby, state that the Government honours all the obligations enshrined in the CEDAW and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, and will rally behind implementation of The African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa", she said.

The Vice President assured the participants that the Government would do all in its power to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in all policies and laws of The Gambia. "I am convinced that the Women's Bill, which awaiting enactment, will serve as a powerful measure for accelerating progress towards the attainment of gender equality in The Gambia. It will be useful in codifying and harmonizing all women-related laws in accordance with the CEDAW, and other international and regional conventions to which The Gambia is signatory", the Vice President added.

Speaking at the same occasion, the UN Resident Coordinator (ad interim), the WHO Country Representative, Dr. Thomas Sukwa said that the facts and statistics on violence against women are shocking. He said that, "

- ✚ Many women – in some countries as many as one in three – are beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in their lifetimes;
- ✚ Worldwide, one in five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime;
- ✚ Half of the women who die from homicides are killed by their current or former husbands or partners;
- ✚ For women aged 15 to 44 years, violence is a major cause of death and disability;
- ✚ More than 80 per cent of trafficking victims are women; and,
- ✚ More than 130 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation".

Throughout the week, students from various senior secondary schools and other groups viewed the photo gallery, watched a film and engaged in discussions to: increase their understanding on the manifestations and implications of violence against women; share ideas on their experiences, and; reflect on what the Government, the UN and other stakeholders were doing about the problem.

Dr. Sukwa delivered another statement at the national parade to commemorate the International Women's Day in Banjul. He called on all stakeholders to continue the campaign to end violence against women beyond the commemoration, and to put women's challenges on the world's radar screen through clear messages.

"I ask everyone, here present, to spread the message that violence is unacceptable. It is unacceptable in any case and form, here in The Gambia, and anywhere in the world", he said. He assured the Government of the Republic and Development Partners, of the UN's commitment to the national efforts to break the cycle of violence against women.

The Photo and Art Exhibition and Film Show ran from Tuesday 5th May to Friday 8th May, while the Parade was held on Saturday 9th May 2009.

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