

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF  
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**25 November 2008**

Across the world, in countries rich and poor, women are being beaten, trafficked, raped and killed. These human rights violations do more than harm individuals; they undermine the development, peace and security of entire societies.

Women everywhere are at risk, but those living in societies experiencing armed conflict face even graver danger. As conflicts have become more complex, the pattern of sexual violence has evolved. Women are no longer in jeopardy only during periods of actual fighting; they are just as likely to be assaulted when there is calm, by armies, militias, rebels, criminal gangs or even police.

We do not know the true number of victims, but we do know that there are far more crimes than ever get reported, and far fewer lead to arrests. In too many places, rape still carries a stigma that forces women to avoid the courts that should exist to protect them. In some countries, victims are brutalized twice: first during the crime itself, and then by the justice system, where they may face trumped-up charges of “adultery” and the possibility of subsequent punishment.

Even when perpetrators are identified, they often go unpunished, especially if they are working in the police or military. At times, these crimes are particularly shocking. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s troubled North Kivu province, where some 350 rape cases are reported every month, victims are also sometimes subjected to genital mutilation.

Even more disturbing is the age of many victims. In certain violent areas of Haiti, fifty per cent of the young women have been raped or sexually assaulted. Of the handful of courageous victims who do seek justice, one in three is under thirteen. During one particularly violent month earlier this year in Liberia, the majority of reported rapes were committed against girls under the age of twelve, some of whom were not even five years old.

These examples come from countries where the United Nations has a peacekeeping presence. Thanks to the Security Council’s groundbreaking resolution 1820, adopted in June, the use of sexual violence as a tactic of warfare is now recognized as a matter of international peace and security. According to the resolution, peacekeeping missions, in particular those with mandates to protect civilians, must now include the

protection of women and children from all forms of violence in their reporting on conflict situations. Resolution 1820 also requested stronger efforts to implement the vital zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation by UN personnel, and urged troop and police contributing countries to ensure full accountability in cases of misconduct.

The adoption of resolution 1820 is part of a growing global trend to address this scourge. This past February's Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking, and the continued leadership of the General Assembly, are additional signs of international momentum.

At the national level, more and more countries are meeting their obligations to protect women through comprehensive legislation, better services for victims, stronger partnerships and increased efforts to engage men and boys in addressing the problem.

This progress is welcome, but there are still gaps. We need to do more to enforce laws and counter impunity. We need to combat attitudes and behaviour that condone, tolerate, excuse or ignore violence committed against women. And we need to increase funding for services for victims and survivors.

I am determined to strengthen these efforts, including through my global campaign "UNiTE to end violence against women", which aims to raise public awareness, increase political will and resources and create a supportive environment to make good on existing policy commitments.

All of us – men and women, soldiers and peacekeepers, citizens and leaders – have a responsibility to help end violence against women. States must honour their commitments to prevent violence, bring perpetrators to justice and provide redress to victims. And each of us must speak out in our families, workplaces and communities, so that acts of violence against women cease.