

# Press Release – UN News Center

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## UN Must Take Lead in Eradicating Violence Against Women, Ban Ki-Moon Says

Impunity for violence against women – for too long tolerated under the cover of cultural practices and silently condoned by Governments – must end, and the United Nations must spearhead the effort to eliminate the pandemic, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said this morning at an event commemorating International Women’s Day.

“Violence against women and girls makes its hideous imprint on every continent, country and culture,” Mr. Ban said at the start of a panel discussion called Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls, the theme of this year’s International Women’s Day. “It is a threat to all women, and should be unacceptable to all humankind.”

The event was dedicated to the memory of Angela E.V. King, the former Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, who passed away last month. She was hailed for fervently championing the equality of women and men.

Despite progress, in the form of international legal instruments and agreements, made to stamp out gender-based violence, Mr. Ban said much remains to be done to “break through those walls of silence” and “turn legal norms into reality in women’s lives.”

To achieve this, the world body must take the helm in working “for a transformation in relations between women and men, at all levels of society,” the Secretary-General asserted, calling for immediate actions on several fronts, including empowerment of women and girls through education and microfinance; closing of gaps between international standards and national laws; and allocating necessary resources and funds to further these ends.

Mr. Ban also urged the Security Council to create a system to monitor violence against women and girls.

Ambassador Dumisani Kumalo of South Africa, which holds the Council’s rotating presidency this month, spoke of yesterday’s presidential statement, in which the Council called on Member States and the Secretary-General to bolster efforts to empower women, who contribute greatly to maintaining peace and security.

“This presidential statement is anchored on the implementation of resolution 1325,” he said at the panel discussion, referring to the landmark resolution 1325, which was adopted in 2000 and aims to boost women’s role in conflict prevention, peace-keeping and peace-building operations.

General Assembly President Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa called for a change in attitudes to begin in the home, where most violence – physical, sexual and psychological – occurs.

“Domestic violence used to be considered a ‘private matter,’ a family issue; this is no longer acceptable,” she said at the discussion, whose panelists included Carla Del Ponte, Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY); Dilian Francisca Toro Torres, President of the Senate for the Congress of Colombia; and Raghida Dergham, journalist for Al Hayat.

Sheikha Haya, a legal expert whose long career includes championing women’s rights, asserted that while “a lack of legislation is sometimes used as an excuse,” that is “not the major obstacle.” Rather, she said, the problem lies with legal authorities who “often do not take the appropriate action.”

The President also convened a special Assembly informal debate on gender equality and women’s empowerment, including panel meetings, which ended today.

At the close of the 192-member Assembly’s debate, she said that a “two-track approach” was crucial to achieving gender equality and empowerment of women: the mainstreaming of gender equality in law, national budgets and economic and social policies, and targeted interventions through increasing women’s access to microfinance and boosting their political representation.

In a separate panel discussion on “Breaking Barriers: Achieving Balance in Numbers and Work-life,” Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro urged greater action to achieve gender balance among UN staff, citing the drop in the proportion of women in most professional grades between 2004 and 2006.

“The truth is that were we to judge UN managers today on their performance on gender, few of them would get a passing grade,” she said. “Only if managers at all levels are bold, creative and ready to demonstrate that we mean business in reaching gender parity throughout the United Nations” can positive change occur.

Ms. Migiro also pressed for putting work-life policies, including flexible working hours and parental leave, into practice. She added that the Secretariat had much to learn from UN agencies, such as the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which have performed well in regard to gender parity.

The Organization honoured International Women's Day throughout the world, through film screenings, discussions, art exhibits, radio programmes, ballets and photo shows, among other events.

In the build-up to the special day, numerous meetings and UN-sponsored events have been held. The 51st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, convened at UN Headquarters, will wrap up its two-week meeting tomorrow.

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