



Press centre

Joint press release

New initiative to address sexual violence against girls launched at Clinton Global Initiative Annual Meeting in New York

Collaboration among leading public and private sector organizations formed to bring international attention to this Injustice

NEW YORK, 25 September 2009 - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), five United Nations organizations (UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNIFEM, WHO) and private sector supporters will join together later today via the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) in a new approach to address the rights violations and health impacts of sexual violence against girls. According to the World Health Organization, in 2002 approximately 150 million girls experienced some form of sexual violence with physical contact.

"Sexual violence against children is a gross violation of their rights, a moral and ethical outrage and an assault on the world's conscience," said Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF. "Sexual abuse can lead to lost childhoods, abandoned education, physical and emotional problems, the spread of HIV, and an often irrevocable loss of dignity and self-esteem."

In 2007 CDC, UNICEF and several local institutions partnered to implement a national survey on violence against girls and young women in Swaziland. Swaziland has the highest prevalence of HIV among adults globally. The survey showed that approximately one-third of girls had a history of sexual violence. Additionally, more than 40% of those who experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes had two or more incidences prior to age 18.

This survey led to a series of policy and legislative interventions in Swaziland, including establishment of the nation's first Sexual Offences Unit for children, and a push for finalization of legislation against domestic violence and sexual offences which is due for presentation to parliament by end of October.

"While it is generally known that sexual violence against girls is a global problem, very limited data exist on the extent of this problem in the developing world. Obtaining valid data is a key step toward mobilizing policy and other positive interventions," said Dr. Rodney Hammond, Director of the Division of Violence Prevention in CDC's Injury Center.

"Sexual violence, including coercion, abuse, exploitation, rape and trafficking, has a devastating impact on children, particularly adolescent and pre-adolescent girls, who are among the most vulnerable members of any society," said Gary Cohen, Board Director of the CDC Foundation and the US Fund for UNICEF, and Executive Vice President, BD. "This grave injustice ruins lives, undermines human potential, and drives the cycle of infectious disease spread, increasing the population of people who require treatment. It also has broader societal impacts, because girls who are protected and educated contribute disproportionately back to their families and

communities.”

Research demonstrates that sexual violence against girls is a direct and an indirect driver of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Evidence shows that the risk of HIV infection is increased following forced sex, especially among children. Gender inequity and partner violence are associated with a substantial part of new HIV infections in Africa, and girls who have experienced sexual coercion are less likely to use condoms and more likely to experience STIs. Stopping sexual violence also helps to protect girls from unwanted pregnancies and the risk of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS.

“Sexual violence against girls increases their vulnerability to HIV infection and must be stopped,” said Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS, Executive Director. “AIDS responses must include initiatives to stop sexual violence as an integral part of HIV prevention and treatment programmes.”

The initiative partners are working together to:

- Provide funding to CDC and UNICEF to expand surveillance of sexual violence against girls in developing and emerging countries
- Develop a technical package of interventions for implementation at a country level to reduce the incidence of sexual violence against girls, based on data obtained and proven intervention strategies
- Prepare and launch a major media campaign to elevate awareness of this problem and motivate social and behavioral change

These three intervention strategies are pillars of what is expected to emerge as a global movement to address this devastating human injustice and public health problem.

“Sexual violence is a major priority that must be tackled by all, through many interventions,” said Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA. “We hope our partnership in this initiative will help reduce such violence through the concrete actions that it proposes.”

ABOUT INVOLVED PARTIES

Lead Organizations

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and UNICEF are committing to conduct national research on sexual violence against girls in a broad number of countries and develop a technical package of interventions. Seven additional countries in Asia and Africa have already expressed interest in initiating national surveys, the first of which will begin in September, 2009.

Utilizing donor funds raised through the CDC Foundation, CDC is committing to expand its investments in public health efforts to prevent sexual violence and establish a full time staff of epidemiologists and other public health professionals, who will be responsible for design and implementation of the expanded surveillance effort and development of the technical package of interventions.

UNICEF is committing to partner with CDC on this initiative. Through its Country Representatives, UNICEF will serve as the collaborating link to country governments and other key stakeholders, and will lead the process of recruiting and deploying local interviewers to complete survey work in-country (assuming sufficient funding is obtained from donors and other sources).

Key Partners

The **CDC Foundation** is committing to serve as the primary coordinating body for receiving and allocating funds to the appropriate areas of CDC and other implementing partners, monitoring

progress, and providing progress reports to donors and other key stakeholders.

The Nduna Foundation, led by Amy Robbins, Founder, is committing substantial financial resources to the CDC Foundation to launch this effort, and strategic support to planning, communications and branding efforts. Amy is a board director of the US Fund for UNICEF and Millennium Promise amongst others and is also a member of The Advisory Board for The Elders.

Grupo ABC, a major Marketing Communications and Services conglomerate headquartered in Brazil, is committing global pro bono media and communications services to mobilize social and behavioral changes in support of reducing sexual violence against girls. This commitment includes developing media content through platforms such as public service announcements (PSAs) and soap operas, and working with local media leaders in Africa to achieve message placement in newspapers, radio, television and the internet. Grupo ABC is also leading efforts to integrate messages related to this initiative into the social messaging of the World Cup in South Africa (2010) and in Brazil (2014).

The World Health Organization (WHO) will collaborate with CDC and UNICEF on developing the technical package of interventions. WHO will also work directly with in-country governments and organizations to ensure there are clear and effective implementation guidelines, standards and momentum following the completion of national surveillance.

The Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) with its co-sponsors will leverage the AIDS response as an opportunity to reduce sexual violence and support the initiative partners' efforts to develop comprehensive responses to sexual violence and HIV prevention and treatment within and beyond the health sector. UNAIDS will provide substantial funding to support this issue.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) will work with all initiative partners to provide financial support as well as expert technical advice on health, ending violence against girls and women, and supporting their human rights.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) works on women's empowerment and gender equality, in particular on strengthening women's economic rights and political participation, ending violence against women, reversing the spread of HIV and AIDS among women and girls, promoting their access to justice, and addressing women's rights and security in conflict and post-conflict situations. UNIFEM fully supports this initiative and will provide technical expertise and ongoing accompaniment at global and country levels, in line with its own advocacy emphasis on the issue of sexual and gender-based violence against adolescent girls and young women.

Convening Parties

Gary Cohen is a board director of the CDC Foundation and the US Fund for UNICEF, and is the driving force behind bringing the lead organizations and key partners together to address this issue. He is committed to continued leadership of the advocacy, resource development and coalition building efforts for this initiative. Gary is also Executive Vice President of BD (Becton, Dickinson and Company) and a board director of the Perrigo Company and the Accordia Global Health Foundation.

The Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) has served as the central convening body for bringing together the lead organizations and key partners. CGI venues served as the critical link for engaging new partners such as Grupo ABC, UNFPA and UNIFEM. CGI has also served as the key forum for the steering committee overseeing this effort, and as a mobilizing force for raising public awareness and leadership commitment. CGI had a direct and discernable impact on the formation and launch of this new initiative.

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[At Clinton Global Initiative, partners pledge new support for fighting zinc deficiency](#)

[UNICEF's work against child sexual exploitation](#)