

Violence Against Women Pervasive Problem Worldwide, Says New UN Report October 11, 2006

Painting a grim picture of violence against women in all parts of the world, a new United Nations (UN) report classifies violence against women – whether it happens in the home or elsewhere – as a human rights violation and argues that states are obliged by international human rights standards to hold perpetrators accountable.

In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women was issued by Secretary-General Kofi Annan on October 9. It says that violence against women can be physical, sexual, psychological and economic, and that intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence experienced by women globally. It says violence against women can occur from birth to old age, and asserts that violence against women by spouses, family members and employers is a human rights violation.

Control of women's bodies is a component of gender inequality, *Violence Against Women* says. It offers comprehensive recommendations, including a call to document all forms of violence against women and to provide leadership at all levels to condemn and prevent violence. It urges states to ratify human rights treaties and to increase funding for services, access to justice and redress for victims and survivors. It calls for "stronger, more consistent and visible" leadership by intergovernmental bodies and the UN system, and stresses the role the UN can play in helping countries collect data on violence against women so as to better combat it.

Violence Against Women offers promising practices, noting that many governments use national plans of action – legal measures, service provision and prevention strategies – to address violence. The most effective, it says, include consultation with women's groups and other civil society organizations, clear timelines and benchmarks, transparent mechanisms for monitoring implementation, indicators of impact and evaluation, predictable and adequate funding streams, and measures to tackle violence against women in a variety of sectors.

United Nations officials are urging leaders around the world to fully support the new study, which offers legislative and other recommendations to combat the scourge. "Violence against women... is really a global problem that has to be addressed. According to the quantitative estimates, which certainly underestimate the amount of violence that occurs, at least one out of three women experienced violence at some stage in their lives," said Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs José Antonio Ocampo at a news conference to launch the report. He emphasized the importance of the report's legal recommendations and the key role women's groups can play in stopping violence.

Reaction

"Too many women are subjected to violence and made to feel shame," said Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund. "The real shame belongs to a world that often blames women for the crimes committed against them, and allows such widespread violence to continue... It is time to end tolerance

and complicity. We cannot make poverty history unless we make violence against women history. We cannot stop the spread of HIV unless we stop discrimination and violence against women and girls. We cannot build a world of peace, development and security until we end violence against women and girls.”

The Center for Women’s Global Leadership at Rutgers University joined women’s groups around the world in welcoming the new report. “This report acknowledges for the first time from the highest levels of the United Nations what human and women’s rights advocates have documented over the past few decades: violence against women is a massive human rights violation that is both a cause and a consequence of deeply ingrained inequality between men and women,” said Center for Women’s Global Leadership Executive Director Charlotte Bunch, a member of the secretary-general’s International Advisory Committee for the study.

“What the Secretary-General’s study makes clear is that this violence is not inevitable: with sufficient political will, funding, and carefully developed and targeted programs, violence against women can be significantly reduced,” Bunch added. “The issue now is [whether] governments and the United Nations [will] make a firm commitment to act on the findings of this report.”

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