

Message by Executive Director of UN Women, Michelle Bachelet,  
On the Eve of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25  
November) and 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence (25 November to 10  
December)

UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet Outlines Policy Agenda to End  
Violence against Women Prevention, Protection and Provision of Services Key

As a young girl in Chile, I heard a common saying, *quientequiereteaporrea*, or who loves you beats you. I recall a woman say, "That's just the way it is." Today as societies become more just, democratic and egalitarian, there is growing awareness that violence against women is neither inevitable nor acceptable. Such violence is increasingly recognized and condemned for what it is: a human rights violation, a threat to democracy, peace and security, and a heavy burden on national economies.

Today we commemorate the International Day to End Violence against Women. Let us take pride in the progress made during the past several decades. Today 125 countries have specific laws that penalize domestic violence, a remarkable gain from just a decade ago. The United Nations Security Council now recognizes sexual violence as a deliberate tactic of war. And significant advances in international law have, for the first time, made it possible to prosecute sexual violence crimes during and after conflict.

But let us not forget, the hopes to live free of discrimination and violence are a long way from being realized. Globally, 603 million women live in countries where domestic violence is not yet considered a crime. Sexual violence remains rampant in times of both peace and conflict. Femicide claims far too many women's lives. Worldwide, up to six in ten women have suffered physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Over 60 million girls are child brides and some 100 to 140 million girls and women have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting. More than 100 million girls are "missing" due to prenatal sex selection and a preference for sons. More than 600,000 women and girls are trafficked across borders each year, the vast majority for sexual exploitation.

Violence against women remains one of the most widespread human rights violations yet one of the least prosecuted crimes. Although equality between women and men is guaranteed in the Constitutions of 139 countries and territories, all too often women are denied justice and protection from violence. This failure does not stem from a lack of knowledge but rather a lack of investment and political will to meet women's needs and protect their fundamental rights. It is time for governments to take responsibility.

Let us move forward. I propose a policy agenda of 16 concrete steps for decisive action to prevent, protect and provide essential services to end violence against women. Protecting our mothers, sisters and daughters requires leadership and sufficient resources, effective laws and the prosecution of perpetrators to end impunity. Critical to success is the strong engagement of men and boys as partners in equality, taking a stand of zero

tolerance of violence against women. Violence can be prevented by changing norms through education and public awareness campaigns, engaging adolescents and young people as agents of change, and promoting the empowerment and leadership of women and girls. There is also an urgent need to provide women and girl survivors with the support and services that they deserve and require.

UN Women is spearheading a global initiative to provide women and girls with universal access to critical support in situations of violence. At a minimum, their emergency and immediate needs should be met through free 24-hour hotlines, prompt intervention for their safety and protection, safe housing for them and their children, counseling and psycho-social support, post-rape care, and free legal aid to understand their rights, options and access to justice.

Together with partners around the world, UN Women is working to deliver on the promise of the UN Charter of equal rights of men and women. Bringing together the UN system, the UN Secretary-General's campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women is raising awareness and mobilizing countries, communities and individuals to take action to end this massive and systematic human rights violation. The United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women is supporting local groups and innovative strategies, saving lives and helping to end the indifference, inequality and impunity that allow such violence to continue. To mark this year's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Trust Fund, I invite partners to contribute to the Fund to meet high unmet needs around the globe.

Violence against women is not solely a woman's issue. It diminishes each and every one of us. We need to come together to end it. By coming together, by standing up against violence against women, we will come closer to peace, justice and equality.

For questions and further information, please contact:

Agnes Utunga Phiri, UN Women, Johannesburg; Tel: +27-11-5171674 / +27-71-3439489; E-mail: [phiri@unwomen.org](mailto:phiri@unwomen.org)

[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)

Nannet Braun, UN Women, New York; E-mail: [nannet.braun@unwomen.org](mailto:nannet.braun@unwomen.org)