

Investment in Proven Strategies Needed to End Violence against Women

Message by Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director, UNIFEM, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November 2006

Every year on 25 November, advocates around the world jointly raise their voices to denounce violence against women as what it is: the most pervasive and shameful human rights violation. But the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women also provides an opportunity to reflect on progress made. And there is encouraging news: by now, 89 states have adopted legislative provisions that address domestic violence, including 60 states with specific domestic violence laws. This is a clear increase in comparison to 2003, when only 45 countries had specific laws on domestic violence. The other ray of hope is that funding for initiatives to end violence against women is on the increase. The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, which is managed by UNIFEM, could disburse \$3.5 million this year — almost twice the amount that we had at our disposal last year and close to four times more than in 2004.

These two positive trends are not unrelated. In the ten years of its existence, the Trust Fund has proven to be an effective mechanism to tackle the pandemic of violence as it affects women in each and every country around the world. Trust Fund grantees have spearheaded campaigns that led to an outpouring of public debate and a call for gender-based violence to be punished as a crime; many grants have gone to initiatives that have directly supported advocacy efforts for legislation on violence against women. With far-reaching success secured in this regard, the main challenge lies now in supporting states to implement these laws. This is why for the second year the Trust Fund mainly supports organizations working to ensure that normative legal provisions become operational praxis. In 2006, grants go to initiatives that review court proceedings to remove obstacles for the implementation of existing laws, train police and the judiciary on the application of new legal provisions, or build the capacity of community groups to raise awareness on mechanisms to seek redress. Existing resources are still far from being sufficient and demand is still much higher than supply. Conflict-affected countries in particular need assistance in addressing sexual violence. Yet we are convinced that the positive funding trend will continue as a response to the proven success of the approaches pursued by Trust Fund grantees.

We welcome the increase in funding as an expression of political will to step up efforts to end violence against women. Everyone knows that if you want things to change, you have to put your money where your mouth is. Without resources, even the greatest resolve remains just a good intention. It is for this reason that recent reform endeavours at the United Nations have come with built-in funding mechanisms. Today, we have an emergency fund to respond to humanitarian disasters, a peace-building fund to strengthen post-conflict recovery, and a democracy fund to support good governance.

The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women was established 10 years ago by the UN General Assembly to help ensure that every woman can enjoy her right to a life free from violence. It is also a mechanism to invest in the well-being and development of countries. Violence against women does not only devastate the life of every woman who is being abused, it also hurts societies as a whole. This is why at the 2005 World Summit, Heads of State and Government identified violence against women as one key factor that has to be addressed in order to achieve gender equality and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. What is needed now is to scale up the tested and proven strategies that advocates and practitioners have applied to make a difference and turn them into mainstream instruments. Only when measures to address violence against women are an integral part of national strategies for development will we see lasting change. It is then that we will be able to reflect not just on progress made, but on real success to end violence against women.