

## **Multi-Stakeholder Meeting: Violence Against Women**

**Melaka, Malaysia; 21 June 2014**

### **Keynote Remarks**

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It is my pleasure to be here with all of you today. But I hope you don't mind if I admit that I'm distressed by the topic we have to discuss. It is an important one - of that, there is no doubt. In fact, the issue of violence against women has become more and more urgent every day. So I want to thank the organizers, despite my personal distress, for inviting me to come...to discuss with you, to urge you, to plead with you to become champions of change. Because we need a change in attitudes and in actions. And this is going to need a lot of champions. Men and women. Boys and Girls. Fathers and mothers. Each and every one of us. Each and every one of you.

This is a scourge without borders. We have seen it here, in its most horrible form only a few weeks ago - with the gang rape of one, possibly two girls in Kelantan. We have seen it in India in a series of gruesome hangings of girls, recently. Girls who were not bothering anyone. Rural girls who were simply on their way to a bathroom in the bush. We've seen this scourge in Nigeria, with girls targeted and kidnapped. And in the United States. Over and over and over again. In mass shootings on college campuses and even in primary school grounds. I am partly Canadian and used to be a journalist in Canada, where I covered the shooting massacre of 14 young women - all university students, all targeted by a young man, frustrated because he hadn't gotten into an engineering school, but they had. And much more recently, another shooting, in another part of the world. Of another girl - also because she was going to school. Her story has become a global symbol of courage, defiance and hope. Malala.

If it is a scourge without borders ... then surely, there must be solutions that are universal too.

So what are we dealing with? And what can we do about it?

A recent report by the World Health Organisation shows that violence continues to be a major contributor of adolescent deaths, with suicide and interpersonal violence being the third and fifth highest causes of death, respectively. In the South-East Asian Region, a recent global study found that the prevalence of violence against women is at an extremely high level, with nearly 40% of women having experienced violence at some point in their lives. While the Malaysian rate has only recently been measured and results are anticipated in August, an older study here shows anecdotal evidence that one out of seven female patients attending the outpatient clinic of the University Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC) were there as a result of domestic violence (Abdul Samad, 2003).

Recent evidence from the national prevalence study in Malaysia highlight some tough, myth defying, facts. That tell us it's not just someone else's problem. As a scourge without borders, it is also a scourge that defies income levels, and defies education levels... Violence - in its many forms - is happening in all kinds of households, in all kinds of places.

In 2012, nearly 3,500 (3,488) cases of domestic violence were reported, with few cases ending in conviction. And it doesn't bode well. Evidence shows that boys who grow up in households where there is gender-based violence are ten times more at risk of becoming abusers themselves... regardless of whether the violence happens in front of them, or behind closed doors.

Violence against girls and women comes in all forms. At its root is one fundamental challenge. We call it gender dynamics. But what it means is how men and women, boys and girls, think they can treat one another, or deserve to be treated. There is a clear, collective need to identify and address this key underlying cause. That means addressing gender stereotypes...including attitudes and beliefs that condone violence and perpetuate harmful constructions of masculinity.

The role that education plays in preventing violence is key. Developing gender-sensitive curricula for educational programmes at all levels and taking concrete measures to ensure that educational materials portray women and men, young

people (whatever their gender), and girls and boys in positive and non-stereotypical roles will be key in changing the attitudes and perception of women, and in the status that they have in society.

Schools are also an important setting where adolescents can receive skills-based gender, rights and sexuality education that can contribute to the positive physical and mental development of adolescents. Despite prevailing fears that more information will result in increased experimentation, the reverse is true. Full and comprehensive sexuality education has proven to delay sexual relations in diverse cultural contexts and economic settings.

One of the most disturbing facts when it comes to this issue - is that its not always strangers who are the perpetrators. If stigma and fear exists when a stranger takes advantage of you, the fear involved in exposing intimate partner violence, is even worse. Young women are often reluctant, embarrassed, or ashamed to admit that an intimate relationship has turned violent, so the signs can be easily missed at what might otherwise be potential intervention points, such as schools, clinics, hospitals and other health care facilities. So young women in violent relationships can be inadvertently neglected, despite the need. Our challenge is clear and urgent. Violence against women and girls persists in every country in the world.

It is a scourge without borders. It is a pervasive violation of human rights and a major obstacle to achieving gender equality, development, and peace. Countries across the world, including Malaysia, have set international targets on gender equality. And Malaysia has set goals for itself, acknowledging the critical role women must play, to ensure the sustained economic growth needed to achieve the vision Malaysia has set for itself to become a high-income developed nation by 2020 ... doing so, also means tackling this - and eliminating all forms of violence against girls and women.

The fundamental factor that will measure our success will be in our ability to have made violence against women and girls a matter of concern for men and boys. And that means you. As champions of change. As change agents. And it starts with the fundamental, and one would assume obvious belief, that a world without violence is a better world ... not only for girls and women but for each and every one of us.

[http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/about\\_22710.html#.U8NTJEDDVsc](http://www.unicef.org/malaysia/about_22710.html#.U8NTJEDDVsc)