

ASIA-PACIFIC UNITE CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

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Women

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Nanda: The reality and impact

Your Royal Highness, Princess Bajrakitiyabha,

Your Excellency, Mr Abhisit Vejjajiya, Prime Minister of
Thailand,

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

The United Nations family is honoured by your presence today
at the Asia-Pacific launch of the Secretary-General's UNiTe
Campaign to End Violence against Women.

As I speak here today, women across Asia and the Pacific are
experiencing violence in their homes, workplace and
communities.

This violence ranges from sexual exploitation at the hands of
traffickers to other forms of sexual abuse from intimate
partners.

It ranges from harassment in the workplace to rape in conflict
situations.

It manifests itself in the form of forced early marriages and
honour killings.

Such violence puts women and girls at increased risk of
HIV/AIDS. In fact, women who are beaten by their partners
are 48 per cent more likely to become infected with HIV/AIDS.

We also cannot forget the estimated 'missing 100 million' women and girls in Asia whose lives never had the chance to begin because of gender discrimination before birth.

Violence against women and girls makes its hideous imprint on every continent, country and culture.

It has its roots in the all pervasive discrimination against women, which persists in all our societies.

It constitutes one of the most widespread violations of human rights.

The subject of domestic violence is still considered taboo - viewed as a private personal matter. This means that millions of women continue to suffer in silence out of shame and fear.

The impacts of such violence across our region are immense, affecting all areas of social, economic and political life.

Not only does the violence harm the health, wellbeing and future of its victims; it also harms families and communities across generations.

By undermining the ability of women to engage freely, and without fear, in the affairs of their communities and wider societies, violence prevents women from fulfilling their potential - including accessing educational and employment opportunities.

As a result, the whole of society suffers. Economic growth is undermined and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals is held back by the loss of women's skills, energies and contribution to development.

Despite the many positive actions by countries to address gender-based violence - including the introduction of legislation, policies, and programmes - the culture of impunity persists and the violence continues.

Moni: The campaign at global and regional levels

This is the backdrop that gives such urgency to the global campaign to end violence against women and girls initiated by the UN Secretary-General in 2008.

In launching the campaign, he personally called upon governments, civil society, the private sector, the media and the

entire United Nations system to join forces to address the global pandemic of gender-based violence.

The global campaign sets out five goals. Let us take a moment to state and reflect on these now. The goals are to:

- adopt and enforce national laws to address and punish all forms of violence against women and girls
- adopt and implement multi-sectoral national action plans
- strengthen data collection on the prevalence of violence against women and girls
- increase public awareness and social mobilisation
- and finally, to address sexual violence in conflict.

In the Asia-Pacific UNiTe campaign that we are launching today, these global goals have been translated into a set of specific outcomes to be achieved in our region over the next five years.

Each outcome - as you will see in the regional campaign strategy - is supported by a number of concrete actions to be taken by governments, civil society and other stakeholders across the region. The strategy itself draws on the vast experience of all the various players active in addressing violence against women and girls in the diverse societies across our region. This was gathered together by a comprehensive consultation process over the past 12 months.

We are pleased to add that - as part of the wider regional effort - the UN family and partners in the Pacific are planning to launch this campaign at a sub-regional level in mid 2011.

The campaign strategy will be available after this event as an inspiration, tool and reference point for all of our collective efforts across the region. We hope it will be well used, tested and further developed in the coming five years.

From its beginning in 2008, the campaign has been centred on three main approaches, all of which will be central to our efforts in Asia and the Pacific. These are:

1. Advocacy at all levels of the UN system to secure and implement high-level policy commitments and engage a wide range of civil society and other opinion leaders
2. Partnerships at regional and national levels to ensure ownership of the campaign by a wide-range of stakeholders.

3. United Nations Leadership by example – including capacity development, mobilising resources and providing practical support for the implementation of national policies, laws and programmes.

Nanda: Regional commitments and examples

Underpinning Asia-Pacific UNiTE are commitments made by our governments at a High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting, convened by ESCAP in cooperation with UNIFEM, in Bangkok last year to review the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference Platform of Action.

These commitments are set out in the Bangkok Declaration on Beijing + 15 – reinforcing earlier commitments made to end gender-based violence, including the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The Bangkok Declaration commits our governments to intensify efforts to prevent and punish all forms of violence against women and girls, as well as to step up cooperation with law enforcement, men and boys, and community and faith-based organisations.

The challenge now is to put these commitments – global and regional – into practice more effectively in every single country across Asia-Pacific.

And in rising to this challenge, we have many examples to draw from across the region.

In Thailand, for example – our host country for this regional launch – the inspirational leadership of Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha has been vital in bringing unprecedented visibility, vitality and legitimacy to initiatives to address violence against women and girls.

As the torchbearer for UNIFEM's 'Say No Campaign in Thailand, Her Royal Highness has brought urgency, personal commitment, compassion and substantive knowledge to the movement at all levels – and has served as a role model for the world.

The campaign in Thailand has contributed to the inclusion of strong commitments to gender equality and protective measures in the Constitution as well as the 2007 Domestic Violence Victim Protection Act, which toughened Thailand's sex discrimination laws and penal codes.

And of five million signatures collected globally to support the 'Say No' campaign, over 3 million were generated in Thailand alone.

The presence today of His Excellency Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva is a further reflection of the Thai Government's commitment and resolve.

There are other leading examples of actions taken by governments and civil society across the region - from Pakistan to Timor Leste - from the Solomon Islands to Vietnam.

The United Nations system across Asia and the Pacific is also working to support governments and stakeholders in a range of areas, including strengthening national capacity to collect and use statistics on violence against women and girls - and to support efforts to implement Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security through the development of national action plans and the use of UN indicators to assess progress on the ground.

Moni: Looking ahead

As we look ahead to the next steps in putting the Secretary-General's campaign into action in our region, it is clearly a matter of building on existing momentum, of re-energising commitments we have already made, and of putting human and financial resources into the areas where they can make the biggest real difference to the everyday lives of women and girls.

At we mentioned earlier, at the heart of these renewed efforts are partnerships - partnerships between government and civil society, between the UN system and all stakeholders, between men and women, boys and girls.

The regional campaign we are launching today highlights four priority areas for growing and strengthening such partnerships.

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