

Media Update-2

24 November 2020

UN Women

STATEMENT

Statement by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women Executive Director, on the **International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women**

With the will, there's a way to end violence against women

25 November 2020

We've seen the close connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in reported violence of all kinds. We called it the [Shadow Pandemic](#).

We have also seen the difference between the way that our societies and our public services respond to citizens who present with a life-threatening illness, and those who come for help with a life- or health- threatening partner.

We have seen the whole world respond to the coronavirus pandemic, with all hands on deck, with responsive investment and protocols backed by determination. Every continent has recognized the health pandemic's disastrous consequences and the need to stop it in its tracks. Men's violence against women is also a pandemic – one that pre-dates the virus and will outlive it. It too needs our global, coordinated response and enforceable protocols. It too affects vast populations of all ages. Last year alone, [243 million women and girls](#) experienced sexual or physical violence from their partner. This year, reports of increased domestic violence, cyberbullying, child marriages, sexual harassment and sexual violence have flooded in.

If you take a test to see if you have a coronavirus infection, no one asks you what you were wearing when you caught it, or if you'd been drinking. You can expect with certainty that your test will be laboratory processed, and with reasonable probability that you will get medical attention. The response won't depend on whether you are believed. You won't feel such shame that you

probably won't even try to go to the authorities. You can expect care and support.

If only ending men's violence against women was as simple as vaccinating against it. If only responding to it was as well funded as our response to the virus and its impacts on our societies and economies. Imagine if we invested the same amount of expertise and energy in finding a sustainable, global solution. If all leaders including heads of state dropped everything to lead the fight, if front-line workers like prosecutors, judges and policemen worked to save lives of women and girls as the health workers have done, and if ministers of finance allocated funds and provided forensic laboratories and rape kits like they provided personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing services. Imagine if everyone did this until we flattened the curve of violence against women. Imagine the impact.

We are at the beginning of a promising response that could be expanded to be proportionate to the challenge. Already 146 countries have undertaken measures to make the prevention and redress of violence against women and girls a key part of their national response plans for COVID- 19 in response to the UN Secretary-General's call for '[peace in the home](#)' and as a key part of the UN's next decade of action. But it is not yet at the heart of agendas, and change is not yet at the scale required.

The collaboration between scientists, governments, civil society and industry has been a game changer in the COVID-19 pandemic. That, and more, is the scale and nature of the collaboration needed to end violence against women and girls, across all sectors, and at societal, community, family and individual levels. The [Generation Equality](#) Forum and its multi-stakeholder Action Coalitions reflect this consistent, holistic approach with a five-year plan to engage on change that is systematic and lasting.

Civil society is a key partner in this. To play its role fully, it must be flexibly resourced and the funding cuts limiting women's organizations, crisis centres, helplines and shelters reversed. The EU-UN [Spotlight Initiative](#) is leading the way on this – and others need to join in order to build the response that will truly make a difference. Women are currently being failed by their elected representatives, and under-capacitated nongovernmental organizations are unable to fill the void. Every country's fiscal stimulus packages should include provisions for ending violence against women, and for well-funded social services – crucially including sexual and reproductive health provisions – that support survivors and enable recovery.

Women must have full access to justice, with reliable prosecution of perpetrators of violence and effective prevention of these crimes. One of the reasons that women report less than 40 per cent of serious violent crimes against them or seek help of any sort, is their lack of faith in the system's response. The turn-around starts with law schools and police academies that teach their cohorts to recognize and respond to abuse and be alert to discrimination. It means ending impunity, with strong legal and policy frameworks, and data to monitor progress and help us hold ourselves and authorities to account.

Equally important are the cultural changes that help prevent violence against women and girls in the first place. For this, we have to shift the stereotypes and attitudes that shame survivors and normalize and excuse the perpetrators. And we must engage allies in this, including men and boys. After all, while a virus is indiscriminate, a man or boy can choose not to be violent and society can guide him not to be violent and hold him accountable if he is.

All these interventions must occur concurrently, continuously, in collaboration, and at scale to succeed.

The [economics of violence](#) are simple and devastating. No one gains. Everyone loses, and we have to turn this around. As we face COVID-19's devastation, there has never been a more important moment to resolve to put our combined resources and commitment behind the biggest issues, and to end violence against women and girls, for good. We know what it takes to fight a pandemic. Now we need the will to do it, and with Generation Equality, lead the way.

UN Women

PRESS RELEASE

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

As impact of COVID-19 intensifies, UN Women calls for concrete actions to respond to the concurrent *shadow pandemic*

Galvanizes partners to fund organizations, respond to survivors' needs, prevent violence and collect data to build a post-pandemic "new normal" as the 16 days of Activism campaign kicks off

New York, November 25 – As the COVID-19 pandemic and a prevailing culture of impunity threatens progress achieved on gender equality and ending violence against women and girls, UN Women is calling for robust and decisive action in response to this unprecedented crisis on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. In the run up to the 2021 [Generation Equality Forum](#) – where global actors will step up to make bold new commitments to eradicate violence against women – governments, civil society, youth, influencers and the private sector will lend their voices for the [16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence](#), a global mobilization campaign that runs from today until 10 December. Together, they will demand a reset and to build a “new normal” that delivers a future without violence for all women and girls.

Even before COVID-19, violence against women was one of the most widespread violations of human rights, with almost 18 per cent of women and girls experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner over a 12-month period. As the pandemic raged on, an alarming upsurge of the “[shadow pandemic](#)” of violence against women became evident, with increased rates of reporting on domestic violence, as well as in the streets, online and in a variety of settings. Calls to helplines increased up to five-fold in some countries during the first weeks of the coronavirus outbreak – while in others, they decreased given the inability of women to seek help through the regular channels, while sheltered in place with their perpetrators. Projections show that for every three months the lockdown continues, an additional 15 million women are expected to be affected by violence.

“We have seen the whole world respond to the coronavirus pandemic, with all hands on deck, and with responsive investment and protocols backed by determination. Violence against women is also a pandemic – one that pre-dates the virus and will outlive it. As we face COVID-19’s devastation, there has never been a more important moment to resolve to put our combined resources and commitment behind the biggest issues, and to end violence against women and girls, for good,” said UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka.

In response to a [“cease-fire at home”](#) called by the UN Secretary-General earlier this year, almost 150 countries agreed to make ending violence against women and girls a key part of their response plans for COVID-19. Many have followed through with stronger essential services, such as shelters, helplines and other reporting mechanisms. Yet, only 48 countries, less than a quarter of the 206 analysed in a [recent study](#), treated violence against women and girls-related services as an integral part of their national and local COVID-19 response plans, with very few adequately funding these measures.

Addressing the pervasive under-resourcing of this critical issue, UN Women has convened the Action Coalition on Gender-based Violence, an innovative partnership of governments, civil society, youth leaders, private sector and philanthropies to develop a bold agenda of catalytic actions and leverage funding to eradicate violence against women. These bold actions and investments will be announced at the Generation Equality Forum in 2021, in Mexico and France, along with those of other five [Generation Equality Action Coalitions](#).

Orange the World: Fund, Prevent, Respond, Collect!

The 16 Days of Activism, which is powered by grassroots organizations globally, is an opportunity to leverage the renewed sense of urgency COVID-19 has created and propel concrete action against gender-based violence. In the lead up to the International Day commemoration, UN Women has [appealed to Member States](#) to make concrete, tangible commitments during the 16 Days of Activism.

This year’s theme, “Orange the World: Fund, Prevent, Respond, Collect!”, announced by the UNiTE campaign, bolsters the UN Secretary-General’s appeal and UN system-wide rapid response to the alarming surge in violence against women and girls seen this year.

“Together, we must tackle male violence that affects and damages everyone – families and communities, societies and economies – and holds back all our efforts for peace and security, human rights and sustainable development. We need to increase accountability and question attitudes and approaches that enable violence. And we must provide resources for women’s civil society organizations on the front lines,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

In that vein, this year’s campaign urges all governments and partners to accelerate concrete policy responses within four areas:

- **FUND** essential services on gender-based violence and women’s organizations working on the issue in all COVID-19 response efforts
- **PREVENT** gender-based violence through mobilization campaigns and a zero-tolerance policy
- **RESPOND** to survivors’ needs for services like hotlines, shelters and justice response, even during lockdowns
- **COLLECT** data to improve services, programmes and policies

Addressing gender-based violence in humanitarian contexts

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises. COVID-19 has shown the need to prioritize the rights and needs of women and girls in humanitarian crises. Intimate partner violence and other forms of violence increased as women were trapped inside their homes, tents and refugee camps with abusers during lockdown.

Signaling the increasing needs for financial resources to address this, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) today announced a contribution of USD 8 million to UN Women to fight gender-based violence in emergency contexts.

This new allocation, from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) will provide much needed boost to help local women-led and women’s organizations working in humanitarian emergencies to prevent gender-based violence, to facilitate access to justice, and to provide survivor-centred services to women and adolescent girls. It will also support women, including survivors of violence, to develop and lead transitional justice processes (i.e. measures to redress legacies of massive human rights abuse), at the local

and national level. The funding will be channeled into two year-programmes in five countries where interventions specific to women's needs are currently underfunded.

Around the world

The UN official commemoration of the International Day will take place for the first time in a virtual format and will be an opportunity for Member States to strengthen and advance their commitments to end violence against women and girls. The event will count on the participation of the Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres, representatives from UN Member States, Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General and UNFPA Executive Director Natalia Kanem. UN Women Goodwill Ambassadors Nicole Kidman and Cindy Bishop; SDG Advocate, UNODC Goodwill Ambassador and Nobel Peace Prize, Nadia Murad; and Nobel Peace Prize Nominee and Founder of Rise, Amanda Nguyen, among others, will participate via video.

As in previous years, iconic buildings and monuments all over the world will be lit in orange to call for a brighter future where women and girls can live free from violence, including the Giza Pyramids and the Sphinx in Egypt; the Moai statues in Eastern Island, Chile; the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova; the Kuwait Towers; and the Brussels Town Hall in Belgium. In the Netherlands, over 200 municipalities will be lighted up in orange in solidarity with survivors and to mark the 16 Days of Activism.

Hundreds of events around the world will also shine a light on this shadow pandemic, including a TV-show style event in Thailand focused on leaders' commitments to end gender-based violence during COVID-19; and a series of discussions, debates, art exhibitions in universities in Jordan on the role of men and youth in combating violence against women. In Bonn, Germany, there will be a feminist tour in which participants can discover a new side of the city's past and present, learn about famous daughters of the city and about feminism, using GPS coordinates.

A human chain in Bangladesh; an online flash-mob with popular young video bloggers in Tajikistan; a video competition addressing violence against women migrant workers and trafficking in Indonesia; a training on self-defense to service providers and women's organizations in Albania; and a high-level virtual event in Panama with representatives from Member States in the region, are also among the many events planned during the 16 Days.

For interview requests, please contact media.team@unwomen.org.

Share UN Women's [stickers and GIFs](#) on social media and use the [Instagram filter](#) to take a stand against gender-based violence, using the hashtags #orangetheworld, #GenerationEquality and #16days, and follow the conversation @UN_Women and @SayNO_UNiTE on Twitter. More content available in [this social media package](#).

UN Women **handed over the mic** to survivors and those on the front lines. To read the personal testimonies, stories and multimedia content, visit: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/end-violence-against-women>.