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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives**

### Prevention of violence against women and girls

#### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report examines strategies to prevent violence against women and girls. The report concludes with a number of recommendations for future action for the consideration of the Commission on the Status of Women.

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## I. Introduction

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15, the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-seventh session will consider as its priority theme “The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls”. The present report covers the prevention of violence against women and girls.<sup>1</sup>

2. The report draws on the findings of the expert group meeting on the prevention of violence against women and girls, organized by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), which was held in Bangkok from 17 to 20 September 2012.<sup>2</sup> It also draws on the consensus of the stakeholders forum on preventing and eliminating violence against women,<sup>3</sup> held at United Nations Headquarters on 13 and 14 December 2012, at which Ministers of the States Members of the United Nations, permanent representatives to the United Nations, civil society organizations and United Nations system leaders emphasized the commitment to normative strengthening and the effective and accelerated implementation and enforcement of the response to, and prevention of, violence against women and girls. It incorporates analysis and examples provided by Member States<sup>4</sup> and concludes with recommendations for the Commission to consider.

## II. Global and regional legal and policy frameworks

3. According to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (General Assembly resolution 48/104), violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life, and whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or private persons. Violence against women and girls has been recognized as a form of discrimination and a human rights violation. States have obligations to take appropriate measures to prevent, prosecute all forms of, and protect women and girls from violence.

4. The important role of efforts aimed at the prevention of such violence has been stressed in various legal and policy instruments developed at the global and regional levels. The responsibility of States to address social and cultural patterns of conduct leading to discrimination and stereotyped roles for women and men, lying at the

<sup>1</sup> See also E/CN.6/2013/3, on multi-sectoral services and responses for women and girls subjected to violence.

<sup>2</sup> The report of the meeting is available from <http://www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Report-of-the-EGM-on-Prevention-of-Violence-against-Women-and-Girls.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The report of the forum is available from <http://www.unwomen.org/2012/12/stakeholders-forum-concludes-with-a-call-to-governments-to-commit-to-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls/>.

<sup>4</sup> Argentina, Austria, Colombia, Denmark, Djibouti, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Madagascar, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Paraguay, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

core of prevention, is outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women explicitly recognizes such violence as a form of discrimination in its General Recommendation No. 19 and has further stressed in its concluding observations to States the importance of prevention to address its root causes. Articles 19 and 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child also require that States undertake to protect girls from violence, including through measures to prevent such violence.

5. The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, identified violence against women as one of the 12 critical areas of concern that required urgent action to achieve the goals of equality, development and peace, and called for its prevention. The call for such action was reiterated during its five-year review of the Platform for Action (see General Assembly resolution S-23/3, annex, para. 69).

6. The General Assembly has consistently stressed the importance of the prevention of violence against women in a number of its resolutions, including on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women<sup>5</sup> and on strengthening crime prevention and criminal justice responses to violence against women (see resolution 65/228).

7. The Human Rights Council underscored the need for the prevention of such violence, including through its resolutions,<sup>6</sup> the recommendations of the universal periodic review, and through its special procedures. The Commission on the Status of Women addressed the topic at its forty-seventh session, held in 2003, and in the agreed conclusions of its forty-second session, held in 1998, and its fifty-first session, held in 2007 (see E/2007/27). Prevention of such violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations is the first goal of the 10-year United Nations strategic results framework on women, peace and security (see S/2011/598).

8. Many regional instruments have also stressed the important role of prevention, including the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999); the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations; the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (1994); the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (2011); and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2010).

### **III. Scope and current situation**

9. According to UN-Women, country data reveals that as many as 7 in 10 women in the world report having experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime. Statistics indicate that violence against women and girls is a universal phenomenon, irrespective of income, class and culture. Forms and manifestations of violence against women and girls include intimate partner violence, early and forced marriage, forced pregnancy, honour crimes, female

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<sup>5</sup> See General Assembly resolutions 61/143, 62/133, 63/155, 64/137 and 65/187.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Human Rights Council resolutions 14/12 and 17/11.

genital mutilation, femicide, non-partner sexual violence, sexual harassment in the workplace, other institutions and in public spaces, trafficking, violence condoned by the State and violence against women in conflict situations (see A/61/122/Add.1 and Corr.1). Particular groups of women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination are exposed to increased risk of violence (see A/HRC/17/26).

10. Violence against women and girls has devastating effects on individuals, communities and societies, and bears significant economic and social costs for countries. Cost analysis of violence against women, carried out in several areas, including Australia, Canada, England and Wales, and the United States of America, reveals that the annual cost of such violence may vary from US\$ 1.16 billion to \$32.9 billion, covering a variety of costs, ranging from responses to survivors to those related to lost productivity (see A/HRC/17/26).

11. The current economic crises have resulted in increased unemployment and poverty, and cutbacks in social spending on health and education, rendering women more vulnerable to exploitation and violence, and with a negative impact on overall gender equality.<sup>7</sup> Other situations, such as armed conflict and natural disasters, have also increased the vulnerability of women and girls.

12. States have a duty to act with due diligence to prevent violence committed by both public and private actors. Violence against women and girls is a complex phenomenon and multifaceted strategies are required for preventing it.<sup>8</sup> A systematic and holistic approach is required to address such violence, including legislative and policy measures, protection, prosecution and punishment of offenders, just and prompt reparations for survivors, prevention, and data collection and research.<sup>8</sup>

13. Considerable progress has been made, mainly on improving justice and service responses for survivors, but there has been relatively little work done towards fulfilling the obligation of States in respect of prevention (see E/CN.4/2006/61 and A/HRC/17/23). Response interventions, while essential, can only have limited impact on reducing violence. Violence against women and girls can be prevented and reduced, with political will, well-funded strategies, and accountability mechanisms to ensure their implementation (see A/61/299).

14. Despite promising practices, prevention remains a relatively new area, without a critical mass of expertise and interventions. The approach to prevention has been fragmented through isolated activities, such as sensitization and educational programmes. Recent evidence shows that such activities have to be mutually reinforcing in order to have a sustained effect on addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls.

15. Prevention requires identifying the underlying causes of violence against women and girls and addressing the factors that increase the risk of violence. The causes of such violence have been examined from various theoretical perspectives, and in diverse contexts, concluding that no single cause adequately accounts for violence against women. Such violence cannot be attributed solely to individual factors, socioeconomic conditions or relationship factors without considering that it

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<sup>7</sup> Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, *Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Women, Rights and Gender Equality* (Geneva, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization, *Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence against Women: Taking Action and Generating Evidence* (Geneva, 2010).

is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men and systemic gender-based discrimination (see A/61/299).

16. Public health approaches have developed an “ecological model” to further identify such risk factors at different levels and explain their interplay.<sup>9</sup> At the individual level, the factors include social and economic status, individual behaviours and histories of exposure to violence. At the family level, they include male control of wealth and decision-making within the family, conflict within the parent/child relationship and disparities in social and economic status. Other factors include community attitudes that tolerate such violence; inadequate laws, policies for the prevention and punishment of violence or their inadequate implementation, as well as socioeconomic structures that support gender inequality.

17. In order to effectively address the root causes of violence against women and girls it is essential to develop evidence-based and multi-sectoral strategies. The current report will mainly focus on identifying strategies that address all forms of gender-based violence, perpetrated by both State and non-State actors, against all groups of women, since some risk factors are shared across all forms of such violence and for all groups of women. Particular risk factors, however, may apply for specific forms of violence and groups of women and girls for which tailored strategies have to be considered. For instance, women living with HIV are exposed to increased risk of violence, if they reveal their status, while violence against women and power inequalities in relationships can increase the risk of HIV infection.<sup>10</sup>

18. Strategies for prevention of violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, in conflict-affected settings, should aim at ending impunity and promoting zero tolerance for such violence. Strategies in these settings share commonalities with strategies applied in stable settings, including in the areas of community mobilization, changing social norms and economic empowerment of women and girls. Limited research and practice regarding effective prevention of such violence in these settings remains a challenge. Efforts may include engaging with State and non-State armed actors to comply with international law, as well as enhancing their accountability, including through the enforcement of codes of conduct. Prevention approaches by peacekeeping missions include the threat of sanctions for perpetrators, conducting training of armed actors and consultations with women and girls. Other prevention strategies include disarmament and reintegration. Such efforts are also often fragmented, underresourced and lack impact evaluation.

19. Although the focus of the current report is on the prevention of violence before it occurs, it has to be stressed that a holistic approach, spanning the continuum of prevention and multisectorial responses, is required to effectively address violence against women and girls. Prevention of and responses to such violence are interlinked. Prevention and awareness-raising activities often result in increased reporting and demand from survivors for support. Services should be therefore in place to ensure their support and protection. On the other hand, effective responses

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<sup>9</sup> Lori Heisse, “What works to prevent partner violence: an evidence overview”, working paper on study supported by the Department for International Development, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, December 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Rachel Jewkes and others, “Intimate partner violence, relationship power inequity, and incidence of HIV infection in young women in South Africa: a cohort study”, *The Lancet*, vol. 376 (July 2010), pp. 41-48.

and services prevent violence from reoccurring and convey that such violence is not tolerated.

#### **IV. National legal, policy frameworks and resources**

20. Legal and policy frameworks provide the foundation for a coordinated, holistic and effective approach to addressing violence against women and girls. The allocation of adequate resources to ensure their effective implementation is critical.

21. A comprehensive legal framework that not only prohibits and criminalizes violence against women and girls but also provides for prevention measures, support to and protection of survivors is crucial. States have initially focused their legislative responses on criminalizing such violence, with indications that rates of violence against women and girls can be reduced in settings that hold perpetrators accountable.

22. Several gaps have been identified, however, in legislation and its enforcement. For instance, various forms of such violence, such as marital rape, have not been criminalized in many countries, while loopholes in laws, discriminatory attitudes of officials and procedural barriers for access to justice have contributed to low rates of reporting and conviction. In its report entitled “Progress of the world’s women: in pursuit of justice (2011-2012)”, UN-Women indicates that complementary measures, including capacity-building of law enforcement officials, and the establishment of specialized police units and courts, are therefore required.

23. States have been increasingly adopting more comprehensive laws which also include prevention measures.<sup>11</sup> Such comprehensive laws were adopted in Colombia, Italy and the Republic of Korea, which also mandated educational programmes and awareness-raising.

24. Laws and policies should also address the socioeconomic inequalities between men and women (see A/HRC/20/25/Add.1 and A/HRC/11/6) and protect the human rights of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive rights. Reforms should ensure that the economic, legal, social and political empowerment of women and girls contributes to the shifting of norms that condone such violence. Evidence shows that rates of such violence are higher in settings where economic and social gender inequality prevails.<sup>12</sup> These interlinkages between gender equality, women’s empowerment and violence against women and girls should be considered in future development frameworks.

25. Legal and policy reforms are essential to ensure the equal rights of women and girls to education, social security, property, employment, political participation and an adequate standard of living. They should also incorporate special measures for women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination (see A/HRC/20/28). To that end, Jordan and Slovenia reported on the adoption and/or reforms of laws and policies to address gender-based discrimination. Kuwait and Sri Lanka took measures to increase women’s political participation, and Sweden took measures to

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<sup>11</sup> *Handbook for Legislation on Violence Against Women*, 2010 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.IV.2); see also E/CN.15/2012/13.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Development Fund for Women, “Investing in gender equality: ending violence against women” (2010).

increase women's access to labour markets and financial resources, with a focus on rural and immigrant women. Despite progress,<sup>13</sup> discriminatory laws and practices continue to exist, also in relation to women's rights to marriage and divorce, inheritance and decent work.<sup>14</sup>

26. Addressing women's economic inequality is of particular importance. Evidence is emerging of the effectiveness of microfinance programmes in reducing violence against women and girls in the long term. Such programmes are particularly effective when they promote gender equality and engage men, boys and the broader communities. In South Africa, for example, the evaluated Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity study demonstrated a 55 per cent reduction in intimate partner violence over a two-year period.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, such programmes should consider, prior to implementation, the adverse effects that may occur in the short term, including an increased risk of violence against women and girls, as traditional gender roles are challenged.

27. Women's empowerment and participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and overall decision-making in post-conflict contexts is crucial in preventing violence against women and girls. Women's meaningful participation in peace talks, peacekeeping missions, the security sector, transitional justice processes, peacebuilding institutions and decision-making bodies is crucial in creating a safer post-conflict environment.

28. National action plans and interventions that specifically address violence against women and girls are a critical component of a prevention strategy and provide the framework for the development and implementation of comprehensive and coordinated strategies. A review of such national action plans and policies indicated that most policies were limited to responding to violence, while those that contained specific prevention activities mainly focused on awareness-raising and school-based programmes.<sup>15</sup> Many reporting States, including Denmark, Malta, Mauritius and Slovenia have adopted national action plans to address violence against women in general, or in specific forms, similarly including prevention measures, such as awareness-raising.

29. In many conflict and post-conflict settings, Governments have adopted national action plans on gender-based violence or on women, peace and security more broadly, which include provisions to prevent violence against women and girls. In such settings, all actors should ensure that prevention of violence against women and girls is also integrated into broader policies that cover contingency and recovery phases.

30. Lack of adequate resources and coordination were identified by human rights treaty bodies as challenges for the implementation of national action plans and policies. In order to enhance such coordination, several States, such as Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Mauritius, Mexico, Poland, Spain, the Sudan, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, reported on the

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<sup>13</sup> For a measurement of gender equality in different countries, see Social Institutions and Gender Index, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

<sup>14</sup> World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (Washington, D.C., 2011).

<sup>15</sup> UN-Women, "Handbook for national action plans on violence against women" (2010); the plan of the government of Victoria (Australia) adopted a holistic approach to violence and its prevention; see similar conclusions contained in A/HRC/17/23.



establishment of coordination mechanisms, including task forces, dedicated units, working and interministerial groups or observatories. Only a few States referred to the allocation of resources for the implementation of prevention activities.

31. Since violence is associated with broader issues, it is important to ensure that violence against women and girls is also addressed in other policies and programmes related to public health, including sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS responses, alcohol and substance abuse, security and arms control, gender equality, education, employment and development.

32. To that end, Senegal, for instance, reported on the adoption of a national action plan to address poverty as a means to address violence against women and girls, while in Japan, Hungary and Slovenia, national action plans on gender equality also included measures to address such violence. In Finland, a national action plan was developed to address alcohol abuse, as a contributing factor of such violence. In the Republic of Korea, the impact of violence against women and girls on their overall empowerment was recognized by including measures to prevent such violence in the national action plan on women's empowerment, while Colombia included such measures in its national action plan on development.

33. Other policies and programmes on serious health issues, such as HIV/AIDS, closely associated with violence against women and girls, should include specific interventions to address violence against women and girls, and vice versa.<sup>16</sup>

## V. Social norms

34. Social and cultural patterns of conduct that lead to discrimination and stereotyped roles for women and men can legitimize, exacerbate or tolerate violence against women and girls. Addressing attitudes, behaviours and beliefs that condone such violence, and working with men and boys to promote gender equality and respectful relationships, should be essential components of prevention strategies.

### A. Awareness-raising campaigns

35. Awareness-raising and social marketing campaigns on the causes and consequences of violence are an important component of a comprehensive prevention strategy. Such campaigns enhance awareness of women's and girls' rights, available remedies and services for survivors, and convey the unacceptability of violence and discrimination against women and girls. Such campaigns need to be held regularly, be sustained, extended to remote areas and tailored to reach particular population groups. Almost all reporting States referred to having launched campaigns raising awareness on such violence, often targeting young men and women, or particular groups of women.

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<sup>16</sup> Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, *Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic* (Geneva, 2010).

## B. Community mobilization

36. Social norms at the community level, expressed through practices and systems, for example, traditional justice systems, that may not always uphold the human rights of women and girls,<sup>17</sup> are particularly important. Community leaders and authorities can play an important role in promoting gender equality and non-violence, considering also their reach to marginalized parts of population. However, the main hindrances include the limited capacity of community officials and the lack of coordination between the national and local levels.

37. Community mobilization initiatives may include grass-roots campaigns, working with the media and engaging all levels of society, as examples of good practices.<sup>18</sup> Japan adopted such a participatory approach in community mobilization initiatives by involving women's and children's associations in programmes through international development cooperation.

38. Some promising practices of effectively changing norms and behaviours at the community level derive from programmes designed to discourage harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.<sup>18</sup> By linking human rights to local values and engaging religious and traditional leaders, communities have collectively declared abandonment of the practice. Apart from discouraging female genital mutilation, there is evidence that such programmes had a positive impact on other forms of violence against women and girls, such as early and forced marriage, and intimate partner violence.<sup>19</sup>

## C. Educational programmes

39. Programmes at all levels of formal education, and non-formal education settings, that promote gender equality and human rights, can have a significant impact on children and young people early in life. Many school-based programmes have demonstrated reductions in violence and improvements in educational achievement.<sup>19</sup>

40. Many of the programmes focus on developing respectful relationships, building non-violent communication skills and promoting gender equality, and often include components addressing physical violence, including corporal punishment and other forms of violent discipline, sexual violence and abuse, and bullying. In Sri Lanka, for instance, physical punishment of students is prohibited by law. Holistic school-based programmes that include training of teachers, parenting education and peer mediation proved to be the most effective.<sup>19</sup>

41. Several States, such as Austria, Denmark, Djibouti, Estonia, Italy, Poland, Qatar, Slovenia, Spain, the Sudan and Sweden, reported on initiatives to promote

<sup>17</sup> Sarah Bott, Andrew Morrison and Mary Ellsberg, "Preventing and responding to gender-based violence in middle and low-income countries: a global review and analysis", World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. 3618 (2005).

<sup>18</sup> Lori Michau, "Community mobilization: preventing partner violence by changing social norms", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on the prevention of violence against women and girls, held in Bangkok from 17 to 20 September 2012.

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF, Innocenti Research Centre, *The Dynamics of Social Change: Towards the Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in Five African Countries* (Florence, Italy, 2010).

safety and gender equality in schools, including sensitization of teachers, students and parents, as well as a revision of textbooks. In Finland, a positively evaluated programme addresses bullying in schools. In Argentina, Colombia and Mexico, educational programmes also include sexuality education.

42. Tertiary education can provide an opportunity to sensitize and train future professionals dealing with cases of violence against women and girls, including legal and health professionals, through specialized courses and curricula.

43. Nevertheless, many children and young people, especially the most marginalized ones, are outside the education system. It is important to ensure their enrolment in schools and to identify skills-building for healthy relationships, through community mobilization and other non-formal education programmes, including in sporting clubs and organizations.

#### **D. Men and boys**

44. Men and boys can play a positive role in challenging gender stereotypes and shaping respectful, gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours. Research demonstrates that perpetration of sexual violence by men against women is often based on their perception of the inferiority of women,<sup>20</sup> while men with more gender-equitable attitudes are less likely to perpetrate sexual violence.<sup>21</sup>

45. According to an expert group meeting held in Brazil in 2004, men and boys need to be actively involved in interventions aimed at promoting positive constructions of masculinity, gender equality and equal sharing of responsibilities in different areas, including child-rearing and parenting, domestic work and caregiving. As a means of challenging gender stereotypes, Mauritius developed a programme to promote men's responsibilities within the family.

46. Several programmes have been developed to involve men and boys, including in bystander programmes, which encourage men to address attitudes that perpetuate negative gender stereotypes with their peers,<sup>22</sup> as well as in community mobilization and awareness-raising campaigns. Research findings increasingly show the positive impact of such programmes on men's gender-related attitudes and practices.<sup>23</sup> Women's concerns, rights and safety need, however, to remain at the centre of any initiatives.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Partners for Prevention, "The change project: understanding gender, masculinities and power to prevent gender-based violence" — project overview and summary of preliminary research findings (2012).

<sup>21</sup> Barker and others, "Evolving men: initial results from the international men and gender equality survey" (Washington, D.C., International Center for Research on Women, and Rio De Janeiro, Instituto Promundo, January 2011).

<sup>22</sup> VicHealth, *More than Ready: Bystander Action to Prevent Violence against Women in the Victorian Community* (Carlton, Australia, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Gary Barker and Dean Peacock, "Working with men and boys to promote gender equality: a review of the field and emerging approaches", paper prepared for the expert group meeting on the prevention of violence against women and girls, held in Bangkok from 17 to 20 September 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Lori Michau and Dipak Naker, *Preventing Gender-based Violence in the Horn, East and Southern Africa: A Regional Dialogue* (Raising Voices and United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2004).

## **VI. Institutions and capacity development**

47. Workplaces and justice, social welfare, health and educational institutions, for example, as well as the military and the police, have a key role in identifying, monitoring, responding to and preventing violence against women and girls. It is important to promote gender equality and non-tolerance of violence within these institutions and to strengthen their capacity to prevent and respond to the violence against women and girls that occurs within or outside their settings.

### **A. Workplaces**

48. Surveys have shown that women face high rates of violence in workplaces.<sup>24</sup> For example, 40 to 50 per cent of women in the European Union report some form of sexual harassment in the workplace, while in Asia-Pacific countries the rates range from 30 to 40 per cent of women workers.<sup>24</sup> The risk of such violence is increased for particular groups of women workers, for example, domestic and migrant workers.<sup>25</sup>

49. It is crucial to review policies and practices against discrimination and sexual harassment in order to develop reporting mechanisms and programmes on gender equality and human rights and carry out staff sensitization and peer education. Such initiatives should be tailored to the specific industry or workplace context and should be designed in consultation with Governments and employers' and workers' representatives. Sensitization efforts should be further integrated into existing human resources policies on occupational safety and health, and anti-discrimination strategies.

50. In order to protect women from sexual harassment in workplaces, Slovenia adopted an act obliging employers to take measures towards that end, and Malta carried out sensitization programmes for employees and employers and investigations of complaints. In Italy, special agreements were concluded between trade unions and private companies. Mexico reformed internal procedures to ensure that public sector workplaces respected gender equality.

### **B. Role of particular institutions**

51. Schools can be used as a key site for challenging gender stereotypes and promoting values of gender equality and human rights but they are also places within which girls can experience violence. Studies have showed the significant extent of sexual harassment and violence against girls in educational institutions, (see A/61/122/Add.1) and its impact on the education of girls as identified in programmes conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 34 countries in Africa. Key measures to address the negative impact have included policy reforms, building partnerships with community groups, gender-sensitive

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<sup>25</sup> International Labour Organization, *Gender-based Violence in the World of Work: Overview and Selected Annotated Bibliography* (Geneva, 2011).

training for school staff and students, and improving school infrastructures to ensure girls' safety.<sup>26</sup>

52. Health and social welfare services, particularly maternal and reproductive health centres, are key entry points that provide support and referrals to services and protection for families and individuals at risk of violence. For instance, violence against women and girls may begin or increase during pregnancy and following the birth of children. Activities such as visits by maternal and child health nurses, as well as engaging men as future fathers, can contribute to prevention or early intervention efforts. Such activities can have a positive impact on preventing violence against women and girls and other abuses, such as child abuse.<sup>27</sup> In addition, it is important to address violence that women and girls face within these settings, such as health facilities, often perpetrated by health officials.<sup>27</sup>

53. Apart from responding to violence against women and girls, if these sectors are well-resourced and strengthened, they can be more actively engaged in prevention, through sensitization about such violence and its consequences.<sup>27</sup>

54. The security and justice institutions, including police and military forces, are concerned primarily with violence after it has occurred, yet their responses can also influence prevention. The procedures of such institutions, as well as the attitudes and behaviours of their professionals, while enforcing legislation, have a profound impact on community perceptions about violence against women and girls and its sanctioning. Most researchers consider that capacity-building, legal, policy and procedural reforms, as well as addressing discriminatory attitudes, are crucial in order for the institutions to enforce legislation and address violence, often perpetrated by law enforcement officials.<sup>27</sup>

55. Following such reforms, the institutions could be more directly involved in prevention, for example, through awareness-raising of laws, community mobilization, and working with young people.

### C. Capacity development

56. It is crucial to build the institutional capacity of health and social welfare systems, justice systems, the police and the military, and educational institutions, and to improve the skills and knowledge of their professionals. Despite the fact that there is limited evaluation of their effectiveness, they are considered important, given that prevention is a relatively new area of work. The lack of trained and qualified personnel was reported as a barrier for the implementation of laws and policies addressing violence. The majority of States reported on capacity development activities of different sectors, including the justice and health sectors.

<sup>26</sup> UNICEF, 2004 *Global: Changing Lives of Girls: Evaluation of the African Girls' Education Initiative* (New York, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Lara Fergus, background paper prepared for expert group meeting on the subject "Prevention of violence against women and girls", Bangkok, 17-20 September 2012.

## VII. Safety in public spaces

57. Studies indicate that women and girls face harassment and violence in public spaces, on public transportation, on their routes to school and work, and when accessing resources, with serious impacts on their rights to education, work and participation in political life.<sup>28</sup> The promotion of safety in public spaces should be a component of a holistic prevention strategy of States, in collaboration with civil society organizations, the private sector and communities. In Sweden, efforts to enhance the security of women and girls in public spaces has included gender-sensitive urban design and the engagement of local authorities.

58. Cities participating in the global initiative of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UNICEF and UN-Women, “Safe and Friendly Cities for All”, which aims at preventing harassment and violence against women and girls in public spaces, engage in capacity-building of urban planners to design public spaces and infrastructures in a gender-sensitive manner; work with women’s groups and local communities; undertake assessments and audits to identify unsafe areas; allocate resources and strengthen laws and policies. Cities in developed countries, for example, Dublin, joined the programme in 2012.

## VIII. Partnerships

59. Collaboration with the media and civil society organizations, in particular women’s organizations, as well as the active engagement of different stakeholders, is crucial to prevent violence against women and girls.

### A. Media

60. The media, including social media, advertising industries and popular culture, have a particular role to play in either perpetuating or challenging social norms and behaviours that condone violence against women and girls. The use of radio and television has been effective in changing behaviours related to reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, and radio and television have been increasingly used to address violence against women and girls. For example, popular television soap operas and radio programmes, combined with community mobilization strategies, have been successfully carried out in India, Nicaragua and South Africa, showing promise in changing the cultural and social norms and attitudes associated with violent behaviour against women and girls.<sup>28</sup>

61. On the other hand, the media and advertising industries can often portray negative gender stereotypes. Working with these sectors to prevent violence against women and girls may entail building the capacity of media and advertising professionals, developing regulatory frameworks that prohibit gender discriminatory messaging and promote gender-sensitive reporting of violence against women and girls. Italy reported on efforts, including guidelines and agreements between the Government and the advertising sector aimed at regulating the discriminatory portrayal of women in the media and in advertising. Argentina adopted a law that

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<sup>28</sup> Anna Falú, “Women in the city: on violence and rights” (2010).

mandates the portrayal of men's and women's images in the media in a manner that promotes gender equality.

## **B. Civil society organizations**

62. The development and implementation of holistic and sustained prevention strategies require the engagement of entire communities, civil society organizations and a variety of stakeholders, including community and religious leaders.

63. Women's organizations were the first to draw attention to the scourge of violence against women and girls. One of the most effective mechanisms for ensuring sustainable change in the lives of women and girls lies in supporting women's organizations to build strong social movements and to advocate for prevention of, as well as responses to, such violence.<sup>29</sup> A recent study comprising a global comparative analysis conducted over four decades reaffirms the impact of women's organizations on lasting and effective policy development to end violence against women and girls.<sup>30</sup>

64. Nonetheless, those involved in promoting gender equality and women's rights can be at risk because they are challenging deeply entrenched traditions about gender roles, as highlighted by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders in his report (A/HRC/16/44), and they should be further supported and protected.

65. Other civil society organizations, including those involved in such issues as human rights, child protection and welfare, the prevention of HIV/AIDs, and sexual and reproductive health, as well as religious and community organizations, also need to be engaged in prevention strategies.

66. Religious leaders, as well as faith institutions, can play a crucial role in the prevention of violence against women and girls by interpreting religious texts and being conduits of social norms and beliefs. As such, they have a responsibility to consider how such norms and beliefs may interact with factors that contribute to, or protect from, violence. Faith institutions are also frequently involved in delivering social services and programmes and provide opportunities to integrate prevention into such work.

## **IX. Early interventions**

67. While it is important to adopt strategies that promote gender equality and a culture of non-violence by targeting broader parts of the population, it is also necessary to develop strategies for targeted groups, families, parents and individuals, to address individual risk factors, such as exposure to violence.

68. Evidence shows that there is a major risk factor for future perpetration or victimization when a child is exposed to violence, either by experiencing or

<sup>29</sup> United Kingdom Department for International Development, "A theory of change for tackling violence against women and girls", CHASE Guidance Note Series No. 1 (2012).

<sup>30</sup> Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon, "The civic origins of progressive policy change: combating violence against women in global perspective", *American Political Science Review*, vol. 106, No. 3 (August 2012).

witnessing it.<sup>31</sup> According to UN-Women, boys and young men who have been so exposed are up to three times more likely to perpetrate violence in their own intimate relationships than those who have not been exposed to violence.<sup>32</sup> In addition, studies show that parents with harsh parenting styles are at heightened risk of abusing their children, and their children are at heightened risk of becoming violent themselves in the future.<sup>32</sup>

69. Programmes providing safe environments for children to help them to recover from the effects of violence and to build skills in creating healthy and equal relationships can be effective in preventing future perpetration. In Sri Lanka, several activities have been undertaken to support and protect children who have experienced violence.

70. Interventions that generally promote positive and non-violent parenting also have the potential to prevent violence against children and to build skills for more respectful and equal relationships between parents and couples. In Mauritius, programmes have been implemented to focus on building parenting skills and on premarital counselling in order to promote respectful relationships; in the Republic of Korea such counselling is also provided to migrants.

71. Programmes have also addressed the corporal punishment of children by engaging communities and individuals in a dialogue on the use of power in family relationships in order to question assumptions about child beating and to provide alternatives that foster greater respect for children.<sup>32</sup> In Hungary, corporal punishment of children is explicitly prohibited and prevention is re-enforced with the issuance of restraining orders.

## **X. Data collection and research, monitoring and evaluation**

72. Data collection on violence against women and girls, through dedicated, population-based surveys, is critical to the development and implementation of sound laws, policies and prevention measures. Considerable progress has been made, although challenges remain, including lack of uniform data collection systems and reliable service-level data.

73. Given that prevention of violence against women and girls addresses a complex array of factors, it is necessary to develop prevention strategies based on what works in order to ensure their effectiveness. It is also necessary to generate further evidence on successful strategies applicable in different contexts since risk factors may vary according to setting, different groups of women and girls or forms of violence. Nevertheless many promising efforts have yet to be rigorously evaluated in order to formally substantiate their effectiveness. The lack of rigorous evaluation should not hinder the trialling of innovative programmes and the development of practice-based learning.<sup>32</sup>

74. One of the main challenges for monitoring and evaluating prevention interventions is that their impact on changing attitudes and behaviours, social norms

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<sup>31</sup> 25-50% of all children report being physically abused; see World Health Organization *Preventing Child Maltreatment: A Guide to Taking Action and Generating Evidence* (Geneva, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> See <http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/301-consequences-and-costs-.html>.



and reduction in the perpetration of violence against women and girls may only emerge long after the intervention. Since not all prevention strategies have the resources to carry out longitudinal evaluations, the development of indicators to monitor progress and measure their shorter-term impact may be necessary.<sup>33</sup>

75. To date, most evaluations of prevention programmes and strategies have been conducted in high-income countries and may not be directly applicable to low and middle-income countries. It is therefore also important for monitoring and evaluation tools to be practical for settings low in resources.

76. In addition, most research on factors that contribute to violence or increase the risk of violence has been limited to intimate partner and sexual violence. A recent feasibility study developed for the European Commission has extended the analysis of such factors, and their interplay in perpetration, to several other forms of violence against women and children.<sup>34</sup> It concludes that while there are some common risk factors for all forms of violence against women and girls, especially those related to unequal power relations between men and women, there are still distinct or additional factors for certain forms of such violence. It is therefore necessary to identify contributing, risk and protective factors for other forms of violence experienced by women and girls.

77. Furthermore, most evaluations of prevention interventions are limited to measuring changes in attitudes and beliefs related to gender equality or tolerance of violence, whether at the individual, community or organizational level. Nevertheless, more research and understanding is required on how changes in attitudes and beliefs relate to changes in behaviour in relation to such violence.

78. Many prevention interventions that have been implemented and evaluated to date have been undertaken in isolation and not as a part of a holistic approach. It is necessary to develop evaluation methodologies that can deal with the complexities of multisectoral approaches, and extend evaluation and monitoring over the mid to long term.

79. There is a critical need for more research, monitoring and evaluation of programmes in relation to their short-, medium- and long-term impact since what might not work in isolation might work in the context of a holistic approach, or vice versa, or can work over different timeframes.

## **XI. Coordination within the United Nations system**

80. Several key initiatives among United Nations entities have ensured increased coordination and collaboration on violence against women and its prevention.

81. The Secretary-General's campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women, coordinated by UN-Women, also stresses the importance of prevention in its framework for action. The advocacy efforts of the campaign have contributed to the launch of over 100 United Nations inter-agency initiatives addressing violence against women, while the campaign's social mobilization platform, Say NO —

<sup>33</sup> See A/HRC/7/6; see also human rights indicators of OHCHR, available from [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Human\\_rights\\_indicators\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Human_rights_indicators_en.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Hagemann-White and others, "Factors at play in the perpetration of violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence" (2010).

UNiTE to End Violence against women, has registered over 5.5 million national actions to end such violence worldwide.

82. The results and lessons learned from the joint programming initiative undertaken by the Task Force on Violence against Women, of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, carried out in 10 countries, have been finalized.<sup>35</sup> The Task Force has been redesignated as the Standing Committee on Violence against Women.

83. By 2012, the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women was supporting 95 projects in 85 countries and territories, including educational programmes and the engagement of men and boys in challenging gender stereotypes.

84. The United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict comprises 13 United Nations entities and its multi-donor trust fund has supported initiatives to address and prevent sexual violence in conflict. Advocacy efforts were enhanced through the “Stop Rape Now” campaign. It also works with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

## **XII. Conclusions and recommendations**

**85. A systematic and holistic approach is required to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls, including legislative and policy measures, protection of survivors, and data collection and research. Despite progress, the implementation of global and national legal and policy frameworks has been slow and uneven. Efforts have mainly focused on responses for survivors after violence has occurred, while more work has to be done to prevent such violence before it occurs. So far, there has been a fragmented approach to prevention, with activities primarily focusing on awareness-raising, school programmes and community mobilization.**

**86. Prevention interventions need to uphold women’s and girls’ human rights in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 19 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Such interventions need to be comprehensive, coordinated, integrated and multisectoral and need to address the root causes of violence, including socioeconomic causes, such as poverty, gender discrimination and inequality. Political will, allocation of resources and accountability mechanisms to ensure the implementation of strategies and programmes are required.**

**87. Prevention strategies should be integrated into broader policies and programmes related to public health, including sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, education, employment, eradication of poverty, development and security. Prevention interventions should be adapted to the socioeconomic context of different countries and to different forms of violence, including**

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<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2011/VAWJointProgrammingCompendium-1.pdf>.

intimate partner violence, sexual violence, harmful practices and trafficking. The needs of certain groups of women and girls, who face multiple forms of discrimination, including indigenous and migrant women, adolescent girls, those from rural areas or ethnic minorities, women with disabilities or living with HIV/AIDS, need to be taken into consideration. Prevention strategies and programmes should be based on research and evidence, while innovative and promising practices should be implemented to generate further evidence.

88. While prevention is the primary responsibility of States, the active engagement of all segments of society, including men and boys, women and girls, traditional and religious leaders, as well as the media, is required. Collaboration and coordination among different governmental authorities, as well as civil society organizations and the private sector, is crucial.

89. With regard to the following areas, the Commission on the Status of Women may wish to call on Governments and other stakeholders to:

#### **Global legal and policy frameworks**

(a) Work towards the universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and withdraw all reservations to the Convention and ratify or accede to its Optional Protocol;

(b) Take urgent measures to implement global norms and standards and consider the development of a global implementation plan;

(c) Increase accountability, including through comprehensive reporting to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;

(d) Further develop the global and regional framework on prevention of violence against women and girls;

(e) Consider the linkages between gender equality, women's empowerment and violence against women and girls in future development frameworks;

#### **National legal, policy frameworks and resources**

(f) Review, revise, amend or abolish laws and policies that discriminate against women and girls;

(g) Take urgent measures to adopt and accelerate the implementation of comprehensive legal frameworks that criminalize violence against women and girls; prosecute perpetrators to end impunity; ensure protection of survivors and their access to justice; and mandate prevention measures;

(h) Take urgent measures to adopt and accelerate the implementation of legal, policy measures and programmes to protect the human rights of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive rights;

(i) Ensure the equal rights of women and girls to education, social security, land, property, inheritance, employment, participation and decision-making in all spheres of life, including political, legal, economic and social spheres;

(j) **Adopt and implement comprehensive national action plans and policies, with specific timelines and benchmarks, that promote gender equality and address violence against women and girls, including prevention measures;**

(k) **Allocate adequate resources and establish all appropriate mechanisms to ensure the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of laws and policies, as well as coordination among different multi-stakeholders;**

#### **Social norms**

(l) **Develop educational programmes, including sexuality education, that promote gender equality, human rights and skills-building for respectful relationships, at all levels of formal education, including non-formal educational settings, and sporting clubs and organizations; review school curricula and textbooks to promote gender equality; and promote the specialized training of teachers and the overall capacity-building of schools in order to foster a culture of gender equality, human rights and non-violence, including through the involvement of parents and communities;**

(m) **Carry out awareness-raising and social marketing campaigns that address the root causes of all forms of violence against women and girls and promote and extend zero tolerance for such violence throughout the country, in a systematic and sustained manner, targeting the general public and particular groups of women and girls, young persons, and men and boys;**

(n) **Carry out community mobilization activities to challenge gender stereotypes, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes that condone such violence and discrimination, such as early forced marriages, missing girls at birth, female genital mutilation and honour killings; raise awareness of the unacceptability of violence; and promote gender equality and respect for human rights;**

(o) **Engage men and boys in awareness-raising and adopt measures and programmes to promote equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women in child-rearing and parenting, domestic work and caregiving, in order to strengthen gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes;**

#### **Institutions and capacity development**

(p) **Adopt laws, policy reforms and programmes to strengthen the capacity of governmental authorities and non-governmental organizations, justice, health, social welfare and educational institutions, as well as the military and the police, in order to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, within and outside their settings, and to promote gender equality;**

(q) **Ensure that public and private workplaces are safe, encourage women's participation and leadership; and promote gender equality through collaboration with employers and workers, regulatory and oversight frameworks and reforms, codes of conduct, protocols and procedures, as well as through awareness-raising and capacity-building;**

(r) **Integrate issues of gender equality and the prevention of violence against women and girls into health and social welfare programmes, including sexual, reproductive and maternal health, HIV/AIDS programmes and**

**programmes promoting equal, respectful and non-violent intimate and family relationships;**

#### **Safety in public spaces**

**(s) Design urban planning and infrastructures to ensure the safety of women and girls; undertake assessments and audits to identify unsafe areas; engage local communities, men and boys; and strengthen laws and policies on harassment and violence in public spaces;**

#### **Partnerships**

**(t) Support, and engage in partnerships with, civil society organizations, particularly those working with women and girls, to drive prevention at the community level, and ensure coordinated action at all levels;**

**(u) Engage all segments of society in preventing violence against women and girls, including traditional and religious leaders, young men and women;**

**(v) Engage in partnerships with the media to ensure gender-sensitive training, guidelines and regulatory frameworks to promote messages of gender equality and non-violence;**

**(w) Enhance efforts to prioritize the prevention of all forms of violence in conflict-affected settings, including through the capacity-building, empowerment and meaningful participation of women in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and post-conflict decision-making;**

#### **Early intervention programmes**

**(x) Develop programmes combining skills-building of respectful relationships and counselling support for children and young people exposed to violence to further avoid future perpetration of violence or victimization; adopt measures and programmes to address physical violence, including corporal punishment of children; and promote positive and non-violent parenting programmes;**

#### **Data collection and research, monitoring and evaluation**

**(y) Ensure systematic and coordinated collection of data, at the national level, on different forms of violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, disaggregated by sex, age and disability, in order to inform sound prevention policies and measures;**

**(z) Carry out research on factors that increase risk of or protect from violence against women and girls as well as on prevention strategies in conflict, post-conflict and humanitarian settings;**

**(aa) Develop indicators to measure progress on the prevention of such violence, including short- and medium-term progress, such as changes in attitudes, norms and practices;**

**(bb) Carry out systematic evaluation and monitoring of prevention programmes with methods appropriate to the context and scale of interventions**

**and include in the evaluations measures on the cost-effectiveness of the interventions and the feasibility of scaling up efforts;**

**(cc) Develop monitoring and evaluation tools that are practical and feasible for small organizations and low-income countries;**

**Coordination within the United Nations system**

**(dd) Strengthen coordination and accountability within the United Nations system to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls.**

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