

# Closing remarks by Michelle Bachelet at high level event on Strengthening Women's Access to Justice

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*Closing remarks by Michelle Bachelet at [high level event on Strengthening Women's Access to Justice](#) . New York, 24 September 2012.*

*[Check against delivery]*

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Friends and colleagues,

We have achieved success. The world now recognizes that solving our most pressing problems requires the full and equal participation of women. Now this recognition must be matched by action.

I am pleased to join you today in this spirit of action to [increase women's access to justice](#).

We need action because the rule of law often rules women out. It is estimated that 8 in 10 women worldwide have no access to their country's formal justice system. We are here today to take action so the rule of law guarantees women's equal rights, equal opportunities and equal participation. We are here because justice and equality are the foundation for healthy societies, strong economies and democracy.

I thank Finland and South Africa for hosting this event with UN Women and for making strong pledges today to tackle violence and discrimination against women and to protect women's rights. I also thank the governments of Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, Maldives, the Slovak Republic, the United States, and also the European Union and others, for making concrete pledges to increase women's access to justice.

The pledges to empower women in the Pacific to shape the development of their nations, to protect the rights of domestic workers, and to advance gender responsive budgets are moving justice forward. The pledges to

implement laws to end violence and discrimination against women, to promote full and equal citizenship, and to promote equality in decision making bring us closer to equality. The pledges to protect women's rights, to ratify Conventions, to eliminate unequal pay between women and men, and to support police reform are steps towards justice and equality.

I thank leaders for your pledges because, despite significant gains, many States continue to lack legal and constitutional frameworks that guarantee women's rights. I have traveled around the world and listened to women. And women are tired of waiting for justice. They are demanding action.

Women are demanding justice because widespread impunity allows crimes against women to continue. A European study found on average that only 14 percent of reported rapes ended in conviction, and in other countries, the figure is even lower. Sexual violence in conflict remains rampant and largely unprosecuted. Commitment and pledges such as those made today can transform impunity and increase women's access to justice.

Earlier today the UN Secretary-General called on countries to repeal unjust laws that discriminate against women. Urgent action is needed because today in some 50 countries, the age of marriage for girls remains lower than for boys. And when girls are married as children they miss out on education and are exposed to the risks of early pregnancy and maternal mortality.

Today in 72 nations, women remain barred from certain jobs and industries. And more than 100 countries still impose legal differences between women and men in areas such as a woman's ability to sign a contract, travel abroad, manage property, and interact with public authorities and the private sector.

Even where equitable laws do exist, women continue to be denied justice because there is a failure to uphold the legal rights they have been granted. This is especially true for women who are poor, women from racial and ethnic minorities, refugee and displaced women, women with disabilities and indigenous women.

Today one of the most shocking indictments of women's lack of justice is femicide—cases where women are being brutally murdered because they are female.

This gross human rights violation exists in all countries and cultures to varying degrees—whether it is the result of domestic violence or of so-called honour killings or ‘crimes of passion’, or dowry-related killings, witchcraft-related killings, or murder related to organized crime or armed conflict.

Although the data available in many countries remains limited, the emerging picture is alarming:- In Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and the United States, between 40 and 70 per cent of female murder victims were killed by their intimate partner.- In Guatemala, two women are murdered, on average, each day.- In India, there were some 8,000 reported cases of dowry deaths per year from 2007 to 2009.

Today I encourage all nations to adopt and implement comprehensive legislation on violence against women as a concrete step to increase women’s access to justice. I urge governments to place more women as police, legal aid officers and judges; and to devote 15 percent of justice spending to benefit women. Women’s access to justice depends on the rule of law and also on women’s economic and political empowerment and participation in decision-making.

I urge all UN Member States to announce commitments during this session of the UN General Assembly to make the rule of law work for women. UN Women is working in countries in partnership with UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in joint programmes to advance women’s access to justice.

Together we can take action so the rule of law protects the human rights and inherent dignity of all human beings.

I thank you.