



A UNAIDS Initiative

**The Global Coalition
on Women and AIDS**

Press statement

CONCERTED ACTION REQUIRED TO ADDRESS THE TWIN EPIDEMICS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND AIDS

GENEVA, 25 November 2005

Today, 25 November, is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. It is also the first day of the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, dedicated this year to the call: "For the Health of Women, For the Health of the World: No More Violence".

Violence against women is one of the most outrageous and pervasive human rights scandals of our times, and a global health crisis. Tragically, much of the violence directed towards women occurs in the home. Every day, in every country, women and girls are beaten and sexually assaulted by husbands, fathers, brothers, cousins – or by friends of the family. For women who experience violence, the consequences are numerous, and in some cases even fatal.

The majority remain silent about their experiences and do not seek help, fearing blame and further violence due to lack of protection and support. In many cases, even if women want to seek legal redress, they are unable to: 79 countries currently have no law against domestic violence, and many more lack adequate enforcement of the laws that do exist. Fewer still provide comprehensive psychosocial, medical, financial and legal support to survivors of violence.

Women are breaking the silence on domestic violence, however. As part of a multi-country study, World Health Organization researchers spoke to some 24,000 women about their own experiences with violence. The results of the study reveal the sheer magnitude of the problem: in most sites, between a quarter and half of women in relationships had suffered physical or sexual violence. In some settings, 46 per cent of women surveyed had been raped.

Violence is the one of the leading causes of death or injury to women. In a 1994 WHO study of causes and risk factors for disability and death among women aged 15 to 44, rape and domestic violence rated higher than cancer, motor vehicle accidents, war and malaria. Increasingly, research is illustrating how violence is associated with HIV transmission. Violence against women and the threat of such violence dramatically increase women's and girls' risk of contracting to HIV by making it difficult – sometimes impossible – for women to abstain from sex, or to use a condom, in particular when they know or suspect that their partner is not faithful. Violence against women is also a barrier for women in accessing essential HIV prevention, treatment, and care services.

The need for global action on domestic violence has never been clearer.

This is why the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS (a UNAIDS initiative) is urging international funding organizations to expand programmes that support governments and NGOs in their efforts to address the linkages between the twin epidemics of violence against women and AIDS. Measures to reduce violence against women need to become part of national AIDS plans, just as HIV prevention, treatment, and care services have to be made part of programmes addressing violence against women. We urge states to strengthen legal

and policy environments so that laws prohibiting violence against women are enacted and enforced. We call on governments, together with civil society, to strengthen initiatives that empower women and adolescent girls to protect themselves from violence and the risk of HIV infection.

It is twelve years since UN Member States agreed on an international Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and four since they put their names to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted at the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS. Promises have been made. They must be honoured.

Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS

Yakin Ertürk, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and member of the Leadership Council of the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS

Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International and member of the Leadership Council of the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS

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