



Geneva, Switzerland, March 2008

On the occasion of [International Women's Day](#) the International Council of Nurses (ICN) calls the world's attention to the increasing violence against women, particularly in areas of conflict; to the imperative of having women involved in peace talks; and brings the latest information on progress to establish a UN Women's Agency, more than a year after a recommendation to the General Assembly.

The UN Secretary General, in his message for this year's International Women's Day, states, "As we know from long and indisputable experience, investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity and sustained economic growth. No measure is more important in advancing education and health, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS. No other policy is as likely to improve nutrition, or reduce infant and maternal mortality."

- **Violence against women must end**

Violence against girls and women is increasingly being used as a weapon of war, stigmatizing, humiliating and terrifying women, girls and their families. Dreadful accounts of rape and murder have emerged from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq and other countries at war. According to the UN this has been "the least condemned war crime".

- In Rwanda, it is estimated that half a million girls and women were raped during the genocide and that 67% were subsequently infected with HIV, triggering the country's HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- In Sierra Leone, young girls in particular were singled out for rape. Many did not survive. An estimated 70 to 90 percent of rape victims contracted HIV.
- In Darfur, Sudan, many thousands of girls and women have been raped. Many are the victims of multiple rape. The UN says that around 40% of the victims are under 18 years of age.
- Following the disputed elections in December, the surge of violence in Kenya also brought with it an increase in the number of rapes.

Sources: [UN Security Council Report on Children and Armed Conflict, 26 October 2006](#) and ["Because I am a Girl: the State of the World's Girls 2007", PLAN \(UK\)](#).

- **Including women in peace talks**

Around the world, men are sitting down to peace talks: in Israel and Palestine, in Pakistan, in Kenya, in Sudan and Chad, in the Congo, in Uganda. But where are the women? Now is the time to bring the women inside the discussion rooms where they can become policy makers and ensure that women's rights are included in all peace settlements.

The inclusion of women in peace negotiations acknowledges that women are not only victims and survivors of violence, but also fundamental contributors to peace efforts. Women have a vital role in promoting peace and political participation. ICN calls for all peace talks to include women and for women and women's organisations to be brought into the policymaking fold at all levels of government.

- **Establishing a UN Women's Agency – where are we now?**

The inclusion of women in peace talks is a critical step to gender equality. However, it is also essential that women are given a voice on a political level worldwide. Last year, ICN joined the call for the establishment of UN women's agency "to provide the assistance that governments and the whole UN system require to effectively mainstream gender into every policy, plan and programme."

The recommendation for such an Agency was made by the UN High Level Coherency Panel and accepted by the UN Secretary General and put forward to the General Assembly in November 2006. Despite support from Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, the member states of the General Assembly have yet to approve the recommendation.

ICN President, Dr Hiroko Minami insists, "This dynamic UN agency must be headed by an Under-Secretary General, and staffed in every country with the expertise to carry out targeted programmes and to provide the assistance that governments and the whole UN system require to effectively mainstream gender into every policy, plan and programme".

- **What Can You Do?**

If progress is to be made, women need to have a greater voice in decision-making and policy-making on a governmental and global level.

ICN recommends that individuals, organisations, professional associations, etc. act quickly, either in their own capacity or in collaboration with others to get the above message to heads of state, legislators, head of missions to the UN and leaders of influence in all domains. ICN suggests the following:

1. Write a letter/email to your head of state and key legislators calling for their energetic support for the quick passage of the recommendation to establish the new women's agency.
2. Copy the letter to your country's head of mission at the UN.
3. Publish a public statement or open letter on this issue along the lines of the attached model letter/statement.
4. Disseminate your statement as widely as possible, including to local and national media, decision-makers, human rights groups and gender equity advocates.

Follow this link for a list of all UN Ambassadors: http://www.icn.ch/waa_UNAmbassadors.htm

Follow this link for a model letter to heads of states, legislators and UN Missions and/or for a public statement: http://www.icn.ch/waa_letters01.htm