

**THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL**

**REMARKS AT TWENTY-NINTH CONFERENCE
OF EUROPEAN MINISTERS OF JUSTICE,
“BREAKING THE SILENCE – UNITED AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE”****Tromsø, Norway, 18 June 2009**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is wonderful to be here. I admire your work as distinguished ministers. At the same time, I feel as though I am among colleagues and friends. I began my career in law. My formative professional experiences taught me how the law can help address problems of suffering people. I think we share that understanding and that conviction.

Nowhere is this truer than in the area of combating domestic violence. Since my days as a Legal Aid attorney, I have had the opportunity to travel around the world, as Foreign Minister and now as Deputy Secretary-General. With each passing year, it becomes even more obvious to me that violence against women is everywhere, on every continent, in poor slums and in rich suburbs.

Domestic violence is especially evil. Surveys from around the world show that half of the women who die from homicides are killed by their current or former husbands or partners. They lose their lives to gunshots, beatings, burns and other horrendous forms of abuse.

This violence is pervasive and its effects are widespread. Not only are individual women victimized, but whole societies suffer major setbacks.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are here to address this terrible problem. We are here to help break the silence that contributes to a culture of impunity. We are here to take steps to punish the perpetrators, help the victims and protect all women and girls.

This wide-ranging mission will require adopting new laws, enforcing the ones we have and working tirelessly to change the backward mindsets that condone, excuse or ignore violence committed against women.

We also have to promote policies that contribute to women's empowerment.

We must also listen to the victims, condemn the crimes they have suffered and seek justice. I have seen how this can transform despair into hope. I am sure many of you have seen this, too. Now what we need is to scale up this approach around the world.

Excellencies,

This is exactly what the Secretary-General had in mind when he launched his global campaign called "UNiTE to end violence against women." He made a personal commitment to this cause. Since then, he has been using the power of his office to denounce violence against women and children.

During a recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he spoke to young victims of horrific crimes. Most importantly, he confronted the President, the Prime Minister and the Commander of the Armed Forces in eastern Congo, and demanded accountability. When he returned to New York, he told the entire General Assembly that, "We should all do the same in every country where similar crimes are committed."

When the Secretary-General says "we", he doesn't just mean governments and officials, central as they are to this effort. He is also talking about a range of other partners, including civil society, women's organizations, young people, the private sector, the media and the entire United Nations system.

The UNiTE campaign has specific goals for the year 2015. By then, we want all countries to have strong laws, action plans, preventive measures and data collection systems. These are the essential elements for stopping and defeating all forms of domestic violence.

It will not be easy, but we can build on a growing momentum. More and more countries are adopting action-oriented measures. Regionally, we have seen encouraging action such as the Council of Europe's discussions on a dedicated convention addressing violence against women.

I congratulate the Minister of Justice of Norway on the report for this conference which highlights key issues, such as the need for a comprehensive approach, and provides good practice examples of initiatives in law and other areas.

The growth in the number of initiatives has been matched by an increase in the sophistication of our approach. At first, the goal was to criminalize all violence against women. This is absolutely essential. But we now realize that the law can do more than penalize and punish; it can also promote efforts to end violence against women.

In 2004, Spain adopted its *Law on Integrated Protection Measures against Gender-based Violence*. In 2008, San Marino adopted its *Law on the prevention and elimination of violence against women and gender violence*. These are just two examples of a global trend toward enacting comprehensive laws that require governments to act to prevent violence against women, help survivors and allocate funds for carrying out the law.

Friends,

We share a strong faith in the power of law. At the same time, we must also acknowledge that violence against women is a form of gender-based discrimination grounded in historically unequal power relations between men and women. We have to confront discriminatory stereotypes and end the laws and practices that allow them to flourish. This means working to achieve gender equality in all countries, in all realms of life.

I congratulate all of you for your initiative to address this issue, which has so often been willfully neglected, and for placing it centrally in the public realm, where it rightfully belongs.

Many of you have been at the forefront of this cause for years. There is still an enormous amount of work ahead. But if the challenge of ending violence against women remains monumental, it is at least no longer a lonely task. More and more leaders around the world are joining the struggle. More and more individuals understand that any abuse of any woman is intolerable.

We in the United Nations system are committed to doing our part, not just through words but also action. When we combine our efforts with yours, and with those of our many valuable partners, we can succeed. Societies everywhere will benefit. I look forward to continuing our partnership in this vital endeavour.

Thank you.