KEY RESULTS AND PROGRAMMES

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Violence against women and girls remains so pervasive that ending it is everyone’s concern. More and more people, from all walks of life, have recognized they must get involved. UN Women engages with legislators to pass tougher laws, business owners to make work-places safe from harassment, and statisticians to improve data so that violence is no longer an invisible crime. All of them are activists committed to a safer, more just world. Behind them are millions of women who have stood up and said enough is enough. We have a right to live free from violence. The time is now.

DEMOULISHING DISCRIMINATORY LAWS

A new awakening swept the Arab region in 2017 as three countries enacted long-awaited laws to end violence against women and girls. Jordan rid itself of its infamous “rape law,” where a rapist could avoid punishment by marrying his victim. Lebanon quickly followed suit, abolishing a similar statute. Tunisia passed its first comprehensive national law to combat violence against women.

In all three countries, drawing on support from UN Women, women’s rights advocates joined forces with women leaders in government to collectively demand change—and did not back down until they got it. In Jordan, more than 200 activists and civil society representatives attended the parliamentary discussion of the law, bearing with them an online petition that in just one day collected 5,000 signatures backing the reform.

Tunisia’s new anti-violence law is designed to both prevent violence and support survivors. It recognizes physical violence, as well as a variety of other forms, whether sexual or psychological, economic or political. It provides new protection mechanisms and eliminates practices such as pardoning a perpetrator of a sexual act with a minor when he married his victim. UN Women convened influential international entities to support the drafting of the law, at the United Nations as well as the Council of Europe and the European Union. Guidance for parliamentarians on international standards helped propel the process to a successful vote.

In Lebanon, Prime Minister Saad Hariri was among the first to welcome abolishment of the “rape law,” tweeting a promise: “All these steps are part of a journey that we will pursue along with the Lebanese woman until she gains all her rights.”

FREEING WOMEN FROM VIOLENCE

Legal, psycho-social and other essential services interrupt the vicious cycle of gender-based violence. In Moldova, many more survivors are finding these services in part through a new national helpline promoted by UN Women and other partners. Usage surged by 50 per cent from 2016 to 2017. In the district of Drochia, which has piloted a concerted effort to end violence by offering a combination of services, UN Women helped introduce an innovative approach called positive deviance. Women survivors learn to speak openly and confidently about overcoming violence, and inspire other women to do the same. One champion and survivor, Maria Scorodinschi, has become so renowned for her activism that she was recognized by BBC News as one of the 100 most inspirational and innovative women for 2017.

In many rural and remote communities, essential services are typically not available. Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Tonga face additional challenges from territories spread in some cases over hundreds of islands in the Pacific Ocean. UN Women has helped them to begin closing the gaps such as through toll-free helplines, new centres offering combined services and better training for service providers. Around 20,000 people now have better resources to protect themselves.

COUNTRIES STRENGTHENED LEGISLATION TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS SINCE 2014

OVER 7.5 MILLION PRACTITIONERS ACCESSED EXPERT KNOWLEDGE AT ENDVAWNOW.ORG
MAKING THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Mechanisms to prevent and respond to gender-based violence are often few and far between. Among the reasons for these gaps is the lack of reliable, detailed data to develop the right policies and services. In Ethiopia, UN Women worked with the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs to introduce a violence-against-women module in the Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey, a major exercise to collect population data. The survey yielded the country’s first precise facts and figures on the prevalence of violence and has already started to shed light on longstanding misconceptions about how it occurs, affirming high rates among married women, for instance.

Across the Caribbean, UN Women is partnering with the intergovernmental Caribbean Community, other UN entities and the Inter-American Development Bank to pilot an innovative model for comprehensively surveying the prevalence of all major forms of sexual and gender-based violence as well as child abuse. For the first time, five countries are conducting national prevalence surveys. In 2018, Trinidad and Tobago released its first comprehensive data. Among other findings: a sobering one in three women never report their experience of violence. The report serves as an important foundation for scaling up support for survivors and ensuring it fully responds to their needs.

MAKING CITIES SAFE

UN Women’s Global Flagship Programme Initiative, Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces, spans 31 cities around the world, and aims at ending sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence in public spaces. At the first-ever Global Meeting of Mayors on Gender Equality in 2017, 12 city governments strengthened commitments to address sexual harassment in public spaces as part of Safe Cities.

“WE ARE TALKING THE TALK AND WALKING THE WALK.”

Ana Vasileva is a women’s rights activist and a member of the feminist collective Fight Like a Woman, living and working in Skopje, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Together with other feminist activists, Vasileva kicked off a new social movement in Macedonia against sexual harassment, under the hashtag #СегаКажувам (#ISpeakUpNow).

“In 2013, I became instantly famous—or should I say infamous—when I published a blog post about the rape culture in Macedonia. My post was inspired by a trending Twitter hashtag #TheyCalledHer (#ЈаВикале) which was packed with sexism and misogyny under the pretext of humour. After I wrote the blog, I became a target of online abuse and threats. They even started a hashtag with my name to insult me.

I continued my activism, grounded by my belief in female solidarity and feminist practice. As part of a feminist collective, we mapped the streets named after distinguished women in the city; placed feminist books in the hands of statues in the city centre; and spotlighted antifascist women fighters in World War 2.

Then came #MeToo and #TimesUp campaigns. In Macedonia, the campaigns were met with a lot of resistance. The counter narrative denounced the movement as a “hatred of men and sexuality”.

We came up with our own hashtag—#СегаКажувам (#ISpeakUpNow)—and kicked off a campaign against sexual harassment and violence against women on 16 January (2018) at noon. The idea was to share some of our personal stories or stories from our friends about sexual harassment. The hashtag spread like wild fire and by the end of the next day, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Interior, along with the Prime Minister, had issued official support for our campaign.

Our goal is not about punishing a few individuals, but to bring real change in people’s attitudes and the system, so that there is no more social tolerance towards this violence.

“WE ARE TALKING THE TALK AND WALKING THE WALK.”

FROM WHERE I STAND

ANA VASILEVA

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