A group of young women graffiti artists painted orange murals in Guatemala City to support UN Women and the UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign.
EVERY WOMAN AND GIRL HAS THE RIGHT TO A LIFE FREE FROM VIOLENCE, YET ALL OVER THE WORLD, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE REMAINS THE MOST COMMON VIOLATION OF WOMEN’S HUMAN RIGHTS.

UN Women has long realized the power of urging all sections of society to stand up and say “no more” – to harassment, domestic battery, sexual violence or any other form of abuse. Our programmes and advocacy involve women’s organizations, the private sector, schools, media, and groups of youth and men. Together, we are establishing comprehensive essential services, and robust legal protections and practices grounded in nationally and internationally agreed standards. Outreach campaigns unite an ever-growing number of people to speak out for a violence-free world.

PROVIDING BETTER SERVICES

In the conflict-affected northern region of MYANMAR, along the border with China, the trafficking of women is a rampant problem. Many end up married to men in China or are forced to bear children as surrogate mothers. Instability in the region combines with deep-seated poverty to leave many women highly vulnerable to the risk of trafficking.

In Kachin State, UN Women has collaborated with the state government, the police and local civil society organizations to develop a novel system of community mobilizers. They make women and communities aware of the risks of trafficking, and have links to the police, guaranteeing an immediate response if a case occurs. In 2018, over 2,500 people in border communities gained essential information about prevention as well as safe migration. New services to develop livelihood skills mean women can mitigate some of the risks of poverty by improving their incomes, such as through rearing pigs and fish. Legal aid and psychosocial support aid trafficking survivors in recovering and taking their cases to court, resulting in five perpetrators being sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment in 2018. Similar initiatives to tackle trafficking were carried out in CAMBODIA and THAILAND.

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Under a European Union-funded regional programme on ending violence against women in the WESTERN BALKANS and TURKEY, more than 1,500 service providers have boosted their knowledge of case management, data collection, reporting, and referral and response mechanisms. The programme also connects over 60 civil society organizations, including those representing women facing multiple forms of marginalization. It supported the creation of the first platform of civil society organizations dedicated to ending gender-based discrimination and violence against women in the region.
OFFERING BETTER PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW

In KOSOVO, UN Women coordinated women’s groups and other partners in preparing detailed recommendations for amending the Criminal Code in line with international norms, including the Council of Europe’s convention on preventing and combating violence against women, known as the Istanbul Convention. Subsequent revision of the Code means that it now, for the first time, considers domestic violence as a separate criminal offense, accurately defines all acts of domestic violence, and stipulates prison sentences without allowing a past practice of perpetrators simply paying fines. To jumpstart implementation of the new law, UN Women helped introduce a training course for police that has already been rolled out in seven major municipalities.

UN Women partnered with the Organization of American States and its Committee of Experts of the Convention of Belem Do Pará to devise a new model law on femicide for the countries of LATIN AMERICA. It powers up advocacy for nations to pass legislation on femicide where they still lack it, and to close existing gaps in laws in 18 countries. In HONDURAS, UN Women coordinated efforts by women’s organizations in conjunction with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to successfully push for criminalizing femicide in the revised Penal Code adopted in 2018. A newly created government-civil society Femicide and Women’s Violent Death Commission will track implementation.

In INDIA, UN Women has partnered with Unilever to create safer, more empowering workplaces for rural women workers. The company knows this is critical to any business’ ability to prosper. Starting in tea gardens high in the mountains of the state of Assam, women workers, company managers and non-governmental organizations have come together to define and address safety concerns. New measures have included women-only buses for safe passage to work and confidential reporting channels for cases of violence or harassment.

Based on these experiences, in 2018, UN Women and Unilever launched the Global Women’s Safety Framework. It highlights what works to prevent violence and harassment against women, particularly those working in agriculture. In KENYA, life skills training based on the framework has already reached nearly 4,500 students from 10 schools, including on tea estates. They have gained new awareness of how to recognize, prevent and report sexual harassment.

In BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, UN Women encouraged high-school students to generate new ideas to stop gender-based violence. After a marathon 48-hour hackathon, two winning innovations emerged. One involves a bracelet that sends an SMS alert if a risk of violence arises. Working with UN Women and Networks, a business start-up accelerator, the team that created it has fine-tuned an initial prototype, connected with other startups, and is now launching a company to start production. Another student innovation has been the first online platform providing peer support and information on gender-based violence specifically for young girls. The site features quizzes, news and blogs, and is being promoted on television as well as through visits to high schools.

IN HONDURAS, UN WOMEN COORDINATED EFFORTS TO SUCCESSFULLY PUSH FOR CRIMINALIZING FEMICIDE IN THE REVISED PENAL CODE.

Photo: Women tea plantation workers in India act collectively to call for change in their workplace. “We are one. Raise your voice,” they chant in unison.

1 Under UN Security Council resolution 1244.
During the annual 16 Days of Activism in 2018, the UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign galvanized global actions by governments, police, youth, civil society, journalists, artists and many others. Under the campaign’s trademark “Orange the World”, a #HearMeToo theme amplified the voices of survivors with over 500 activities in 80 countries. ECUADOR’s Judiciary Council, for example, agreed to begin regular exchanges with civil society and women’s groups on stopping violence. A debate on child marriage between civil society and the Government in MOZAMBIQUE resulted in the National Assembly committing to approve a new law to prevent the practice.

As a public display of national commitment, 54 iconic landmarks around the world were illuminated in orange, including the Great Pyramids of Giza, the Angel of Independence in Mexico City, the Kigali Convention Centre in Rwanda and the European Parliament building in Brussels. Seventy countries reported stories about the campaign with nearly 4,500 news reports; #OrangeTheWorld and #HearMeToo hashtags reached over a billion accounts on Instagram and Twitter.

In the PHILIPPINES, SINGAPORE and THAILAND, UN Women joined celebrity Cindy Sirinya Bishop, creator of the #DontTellMeHowToDress campaign, to launch exhibitions showcasing the diverse clothing worn by women when they were assaulted. Widely covered in regional and national media, the exhibits contested the notion that women’s appearance and behaviour are to blame. They called attention to how misconceptions about sexual violence stop survivors from seeking justice.

Under the Spotlight Initiative, a global collaboration between the European Union and the United Nations, the #HerStoryOurStory campaign kicked off a web-based video game that challenges players to consider how they would react when faced with violence. It drives home the point that everyone can take action.

Throughout 2018, the #MeToo, #TimesUp, #Niunamenos, #NotOneMore, #BalanceTonPorc and #TotalShutDown movements continued to reverberate around the world, including at UGANDA’s Makerere University. Scholars and students joined UN Women to expose the high levels of impunity for sexual harassment, drawing scrutiny by the Minister of Education, the media, women’s rights organizations, Parliament and top university officials. All lecturers reportedly committing sexual harassment have been suspended pending investigation, and starting in 2019, all students were required to take a pre-entry course on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.
UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women

Managed by UN Women on behalf of the UN system, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women supports civil society organizations to prevent violence, improve access to services for survivors, and implement laws and policies to prevent and end violence against women and girls.

In 2018, the Fund managed 125 projects in 70 countries and territories with a value of USD 46 million, reaching nearly 7.9 million people.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Kenya, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) is implementing the second generation of a UN Trust Fund-funded project to address gaps in medical and legal processes for survivors of sexual violence. PHR’s Programme on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones brings together the police, the health sector, law enforcement, the judicial system and other stakeholders to document and preserve forensic evidence of sexual violence for effective prosecution of perpetrators. Innovations include the creation of an electronic system called MediCapt to document evidence of sexual violence. The project has reached an estimated 83,107 women and girl survivors of violence through the work of 2,206 professionals trained by PHR.

In 2018, Her Royal Highness Princess Eugenie of York joined the UN Trust Fund in visits to projects in Serbia supporting survivors of trafficking in human beings. One project, ATINA, works to prevent the trafficking of women and girl refugees and helps survivors reintegrate into society, including through training and opportunities to develop business skills at a local bagel shop.

As part of the UN Trust Fund’s annual fundraising luncheon, UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Nicole Kidman donated USD 500,000 to the Fund.

In 2018, grantees reached nearly 7.9 million people, including around 385,000 women and girls, and almost 30,000 survivors of gender-based violence. Projects supported over 7,700 refugee and internally displaced women and girls.
WOMEN AND GIRLS HAVE A RIGHT TO LIVE FREE FROM VIOLENCE. But until that right is universally realized, a comprehensive package of essential services must be available to support those affected by violence, wherever it occurs. Towards that end, UN Women partners with four other UN entities – the World Health Organization (WHO), UNFPA, UNDP and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) – on a global joint programme that helps countries extend the reach and quality of essential services.

The challenges are considerable. Laws lag behind commitments to women’s rights. There are shortages of funds. Still today, many women and girls facing violence will never find even the most basic services for safety, protection and recovery, such as timely healthcare, a police response, legal aid, safe accommodation and shelter, and psychosocial counselling. Fear and lack of knowledge limit the willingness to use services. Poor coordination across providers can fail to link survivors to all services required to recover and seek justice.

In 48 countries around the world, governments, civil society and the UN system now turn to a policy framework and set of quality standards developed by the joint programme on essential services. These help ensure that all women and girls receive the same quality of services, and that services are grounded in common understanding of the context of violence, the management of risk, and measures for ongoing safety and protection. Further, service providers should work together to minimize burdens on women and girls during reporting, response and recovery.

A number of countries are taking new measures in line with these standards. Standard operating protocols and a specialized case management unit in the SOLOMON ISLANDS have significantly improved service quality. In GUATEMALA, the national police have deployed a new protocol for the criminal investigation of cases of violence. TUNISIA has schooled 450 health-care workers on identifying and responding to violence, and incorporated training modules on investigating cases in the national police academy curriculum.

The essential services programme has generated significant national investment in adopting internationally-known ‘best practice’ strategies, such as specialized units in criminal justice systems and social services. In VIET NAM, the Domestic Violence Rapid Response Team provides comprehensive health, social, justice and security services to nearly 2 million people in Ben Tre province.