**General Messages: 16 Days of Activism/International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women**

The 16 Days of activism Against Gender Violence is an international campaign that originated in 1991 and links International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November and International Human Rights Day, 10 December, signifying that violence against women is a violation of human rights.

Violence against women is a pervasive human rights violation, a public health crisis, and an obstacle to equality, development, security and peace. The terms “violence against women” and “gender-based violence” are used to refer to a range of abuses committed against women that stem from gender inequality and women’s usually lower status in society relative to men¹.

Violence against women (VAW) in the Pacific is now recognized as a leading violation of human rights, a challenge to economic and social development, and a threat to human security. Pacific leaders are steadily placing increasing attention on measures to end violence against women throughout the region.

**Key Messages 1: About Violence against Women in the Pacific**

In the Pacific, there is a growing body of national and global data demonstrating that a high proportion of women experience violence against women by intimate partners. Approximately two in three Pacific women reported having experienced physical and/or sexual violence from their spouse/partner during their lifetime - very high by world standards. This merits increased action by governments to adopt and implement policies and legislation for ending violence against women, and to ensure that services for survivors are available and accessible for everyone.

Sexual violence, including rape, perpetrated by others than intimate partners is common in the Pacific. Child sexual abuse, including incest, is occurring at serious rates, especially in the context of transitional societies. Sexual violence experienced by women and girls with disabilities, as well as increased violence against women in the aftermath of disasters, are emerging as critical areas requiring protection and action.

Early marriage is common and puts girls at high risk of physical and sexual abuse. This practice occurs in Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. Bride-price is cited as a factor in perpetuating violence against women in some areas. The low status of women and children in Pacific Island Countries increases their vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse, and the subordination of women and their lack of voice in the community leads to silence around many gender issues. Economic dependence and poverty, the lack of sexual and reproductive health education and events such as armed conflicts, political crises and natural disasters also put women and girls at risk of violence.

**Key Messages 2: Multi-sectoral Responses to Violence and Need for Services**

Protection and support services help survivors to heal, seek immediate protection and justice, and prevent violence from continuing to harm them. Effective services and responses to protect and

¹ [http://16dayscwl.rutgers.edu/about/campaign-profile](http://16dayscwl.rutgers.edu/about/campaign-profile)
support victims/survivors contribute to preventing the recurrence of violence and send a signal that such violence is not tolerated.

Given the complex nature of violence against women and girls, States should provide victims/survivors with access to a range of protection, justice and support services, including shelters and secure accommodation, medical and health care, counseling services and hotlines for crisis information, support and referral to places that can assist.

Quality services for survivors of violence against women are sensitive to the very specific needs of survivors, are informed by experiences of survivors, are provided by well-trained staff, and take great care to ensure confidentiality, safety and respect for the wishes of the survivor.

Comprehensive and coordinated services and responses which include Governments and civil society and women’s organizations working closely together should be available to all victims/survivors and their children. Such services should be available throughout each country, and for all types of survivors without discrimination. When a response system is built around the needs of survivors and informed by survivors themselves, services are well integrated and have frequent communication with each other, and referrals are assisted by network members rather than placing the responsibility on survivors to find their way through a complicated system of government and NGO services.

Women and girls suffering multiple forms of discrimination, such as indigenous and migrant women, those from rural areas, outer islands or ethnic minorities, women with disabilities or living with HIV/AIDS must be given equal access to a full range of protection, justice and support services.

**Key Messages 3: Preventing Violence against Women**

Prevention is the most effective solution for ending violence against women. The only way to eliminate violence against women and girls is to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Methods of preventing violence against women include:

1. **Address root causes:** Preventing violence requires changing the social norms, behaviors and attitudes that support or tolerate such violence. This includes addressing power structures that exist in society as well as in social and political institutions.
2. **Encourage women’s participation:** Women should be encouraged to participate in politics and decision making including as a means of advancing laws and policies that prevent violence.
3. **Economic equality and independence:** Economic inequality and discrimination in employment, income and access to other resources such as credit, land and other assets increases women’s vulnerability to violence by reducing their capacity to act and take decisions, including decisions to leave violent relationships.
4. **Go beyond ad hoc efforts:** Ad hoc efforts will not bring about sustainable change. Progress demands, prevention strategies that are implemented in a holistic and coordinated way by Governments working together with other stakeholders including civil society and women’s organizations.
5. **Engage men and boys:** Prevention strategies must engage all segments of society, including men and boys, to challenge gender stereotypes and discrimination and promote respectful relationships.

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2 Key Messages on CSW 57 Priority Theme for UN Women, 2012
6. Target schools: Educational programmes and institutions provide opportunities for changing social norms, behavior and attitudes at early stages of children’s lives.

7. Intervening early for long-term impact: Interventions with families where children are exposed to or experiencing violence can reduce the risk of perpetration of such violence in adulthood.

8. Make public places safe: From urban planning to the creation of public transport systems, building safe communities, including safe workplaces and schools, helps prevent violence against women and girls.

9. Efforts to prevent violence will empower victims/survivors to access protection and support services.

In order to prevent violence from happening in the first place, the need to reach children and young people before they enter into relationships is clear, to teach them how to behave and what to expect in non-violent, safe, power-sharing relationships. Messages about non-violence need to reach communities from every angle: from the sermon of the religious leader, in the newspapers and on the radio, in family discussions, and in the ways that parents model relationships for their children. Prevention programmes globally and in the region are beginning to develop evidence about what works to prevent violence. Going forward, the need to evaluate prevention programmes is clear to see if prevention efforts are on track and meeting intended aims.

**Key Messages 4: The costs and consequences of Violence against Women**

Children who witness domestic violence are at increased risk of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and poor school performance, among other problems that harm their well-being and personal development. Girls and boys who have witnessed or suffered from gender-based violence are more likely to become victims and abusers later in life.

Violence against women has significant costs to individuals, children, families and countries. This includes billions of dollars to national budgets every year in terms of police, health, legal and other expenditures.

Violence against women and girls erodes precious human capital and results in lost labor productivity.

There are increasing number of studies that show that violence against women places significant burdens on individuals, governments and economies.

1. A 2003 report from the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the costs of intimate partner violence in the United States alone exceeded USD 5.8 billion per year – of which USD 4.1 billion was spent on direct medical and health care services while USD 1.8 billion was due to productivity losses.

2. A study conducted in Australia in 2009 by the National Council to Reduce Violence, in collaboration with KPMG, estimated that violence against women and their children cost the Australian economy an estimated $13.6 billion in that year alone.

There is growing interest in Pacific Island Countries to estimate the socio-economic impact of violence against women.

3. In Fiji, a costing exercise completed by the University of the South Pacific (USP) concluded that family violence cost the government $498 million FJD in 2011.

4. In Vanuatu, UNICEF and partners undertook an economic analysis of child abuse in 2009 to develop sound economic arguments based on the lost economic potential caused by child abuse
on societies. The study found that the life-long costs of child abuse amount to around 6.8% of annual GDP in Vanuatu.

**Key Messages 5: Violence against Women Impacts Sustainable Development**

Women and girls are half of the human capital available to reduce poverty and achieve development. Yet gender-based violence undermines human rights, social stability and security, public health, women’s educational and employment opportunities, and the well-being and development prospects of children and communities – all fundamental to achieving long term stability and growth.

Violence against women and girls must stop. Concrete actions to eliminate the debilitating fear and/or experience of violence must be a centrepiece of sustainable development.
Pacific Statistics:

Kiribati:
According to the Kiribati Family Health and Support Study (2010):
- Around two-thirds (68%) of ever-partnered women reported experiencing at least one act of physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner.
- The most common types of physical violence reported by women are: being slapped or having something thrown (52%); being pushed or shoved (43%); and being hit with a fist or object (40%).
- Around half of women who have experienced physical or sexual partner violence reported being injured at least once. The injuries suffered included: abrasion and bruises (54%); sprains and dislocations (54%); cuts, punctures and bites (44%); fractures and broken bones (28%); and eardrum and eye injuries (26%).
- Overall, 23% of women who had ever been pregnant reported being physically abused during pregnancy.

Samoa:
According to the Samoa Family Health and Safety Study (2006):
- Overall, 46% of Samoan women who have ever been in a relationship have experienced one or more kinds of partner abuse. The most common form of spousal abuse is physical abuse (38%), followed by sexual abuse (20%) and emotional abuse (19%). The kinds of abuse experienced by women include: being slapped or having objects thrown (35%); being punched (18%); being forced to have sex (17%); insults (14%); being coerced into having sex (11%); and being kicked, dragged or beaten (11%).
- Of the women who reported physical partner violence, 24% had been punched, kicked or beaten while they were pregnant. In almost all of these cases, the perpetrator was the child’s father.
- About 30% of women who had been physically abused reported being injured, with the most common injury being abrasions and bruises (22%), followed by damage to eye or ear (9%); cuts, punctures and bites (9%); and losing consciousness (8%).
- Women who reported abuse were significantly more likely to have children who died (16% compared with 10%) and to experience a miscarriage (15% compared with 8%). They were also more likely to report that their partner was opposed to contraception (15% compared with 5%).

Solomon Islands:
According to the Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study (2009):
- There is a high rate of intimate partner violence in the Solomon Islands, with 64% of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 reporting physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Sexual partner violence was experienced by 55% of women and physical partner violence was experienced by 45% of women.
- The main types of physical (intimate partner) violence experienced by women are: being slapped or having something thrown (40%); being pushed or shoved (31%); being hit with a fist (30%); and being kicked or dragged (22%).
- Overall, Solomon Islands women are at greatest risk of violence from an intimate partner: 90% of women who reported violence experienced it from an intimate partner. However, three out of ten women aged 15-49 experienced either physical or sexual violence by a non-partner after age 15. The most common perpetrators of physical violence were: father/step-father (59%),
female family member (25%) and male family member (23%). The most common perpetrators of sexual violence were: boyfriend (48%), stranger (27%) and acquaintance (24%).

**Tonga:**
The National Study on Domestic Violence against Women (2012) reports that:
- 79% of Tongan women and girls have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.
- 68% of Tongan women and girls are affected by physical violence perpetrated by mainly their fathers or teachers.
- 33% of married or ever partnered women are victims of physical violence.
- 17% of married or ever partnered women are victims of sexual violence.
- 24% of married or ever partnered women are subject to emotional violence.

**Vanuatu:**
According to the Vanuatu National Survey on Women’s Lives and Family Relationships (2011):
- Among women who have ever been married, lived with a man, or had an intimate sexual relationship with a partner, 3 in 5 (60%) experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime; more than 2 in 3 (68%) experienced emotional violence; more than 1 in 4 (28%) was subjected to several forms of control by their husband or partner, more than 2 in 3 (69%) experienced at least one form of coercive control, and most of these were living with physical and sexual violence.
- Violence by husbands/partners occurs in all provinces and islands, and among all age groups, education levels, socio-economic groups and religions. Contrary to the expectations of some community leaders, rates of physical and sexual violence are higher in rural areas (63%) than in urban areas (50%).
- For most women who experience physical or sexual violence, it occurs frequently, and it is often very severe, including being punched, dragged, kicked, beaten up, choked, burned, or hit with a weapon such as a piece of wood, iron bar, knife or axe.
- For more than 2 in 5 women (42%) who experienced physical violence, the violent incident has been followed by rape.