

A message to all UN staff from UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator a.i Knut Ostby on 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

Dear colleagues,

We marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls and launched the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence on Sunday 25 November. In line with the theme of this year's campaign "Orange the World: #HearMeToo" our first [event](#) saw Yangon City Hall lit up in orange in partnership with the Deputy Mayor of Yangon Region, Daw Hlaing Maw Oo, on 25 November.

On Monday 26 November, we participated in a government-organised, high-level [meeting](#) marking the start of the 16 Days of Activism campaign in Nay Pyi Daw.

Events aiming to honour the voices of survivors and grassroots activists are taking place all over the world as gender inequality and violence against women and girls are among the most pressing challenges of our time.

Globally, one in three women will experience physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime.

We must end the culture of silencing and put survivors at the centre of our responses.

The issues of gender inequality, discrimination and gender-based violence are significant in Myanmar.

Only a half of working-age women are active in the country's labour force and women are critically underrepresented in government.

Further, women and girls from ethnic and religious minorities, those in areas affected by conflict, and those who are stateless remain especially vulnerable. These women and girls often suffer multiple forms of gender-based violence and the vast majority of cases go unreported and unacknowledged. Impunity for those responsible, be it in the home, workplace or in conflict situation, underpins the heightened challenge of addressing these issues in Myanmar.

We are at a juncture in history where Myanmar has the opportunity to adopt the Protection and Prevention of Violence against Women law. This law is critical to protecting women and girls and to holding perpetrators of violence accountable.

I commend the policymakers who have developed this law so that it can soon be considered by Parliament. I believe that Myanmar's elected representatives recognise the significance of this law.

As UN staff, your contribution to addressing the issue of gender-based violence in Myanmar is critical. Every agency is providing strategic support to the government in this area. From the distribution of targeted humanitarian aid and providing microfinance options to women

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entrepreneurs, to training social workers and the police – the UN is at the forefront of the effort to eliminate violence against women and girls for good.

The Secretary-General [said](#) eliminating gender-based violence and gender inequality “is an issue of fundamental human rights.” This is a UN's priority and it is important that we continue to programmatically engage on this topic.

It is equally important that we serve as role models – at home, in the workplace, and in our communities.

Please continue to follow the 16 Days of Activism campaign on social media using the hashtags #HearMeToo, #OrangeTheWorld and #16Days. Talk to colleagues, civil society organisations, and your family – and invite them to be part of the 16 Days movement.

Thank you,

Knut Ostby