

**Remarks by UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Myanmar Knut Ostby
High-level meeting on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and
Girls and its 16 Days of Activism
Naypyitaw, Myanmar
26 November 2018**

**Your Excellency U Hla Thein, Chairman of Union Election,
Your Excellency U Soe Aung, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement,
Your Excellency U Win Mra, Chairman of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission,
Chairpersons from Parliament Committees,**

**Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Mingalabar and a very good morning to you all,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to address you on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls and the start of the 2018 Campaign for the 16 days of Activism.

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.

Gender inequality deprives a family, a community or a country of healthy and holistic development.

It prevents women and girls from fulfilling their potential and enjoying their rights.

Women and girls from ethnic and religious minorities, those in areas of conflict and or who are stateless, remain especially vulnerable. They often suffer multiple forms of gender-based violence.

The vast majority of cases go unreported and unacknowledged.

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The issue is significant in Myanmar.

2,800 women die in pregnancy and childbirth every year.

Only a half of working age women are in the labor force.

They are underrepresented in government.

This situation is underpinned by impunity and permissiveness with regards to domestic violence, sexual harassment and exploitation in the workplace, and violence against women in conflict situations.

We have work to do to achieve true equality in Myanmar and worldwide.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Everyone has a right to live free of violence. It's a fundamental right enshrined in international human rights law.

Myanmar now has a historic opportunity to adopt the Protection and Prevention of Violence against Women law.

I commend the policy makers who have developed the law so that it can soon be considered by Parliament.

This law is critical to protect women and girls and to hold perpetrators of violence accountable.

I believe that the elected representatives recognise the significance of this law.

Its adoption and implementation will translate into many benefits, including that women and girls will be able to fully enjoy their human rights and meaningfully contribute to Myanmar's economic, political and peace transitions.

Distinguished guests,

Important progress has been made by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, and the Ministry of Health and Sports, to develop operating procedures and clinical guidelines for a better response to gender-based violence.

We must continue to remove the barriers survivors face when accessing services.

This is particularly urgent for the most vulnerable groups, such as women-headed households, people living with HIV and AIDS and those living with disabilities.

We must continue to build the awareness and sensitivity of service providers and law enforcement.

They must be aware that violence against women cannot be tolerated -- that survivors must be supported and not blamed.

There is an urgent need for safe environments for survivors of sexual violence to report and seek justice.

At the same time, there is a need to generate regular, reliable and rigorous data on gender-based violence so that policy makers can make informed decisions.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the most difficult challenges to ending violence against women is addressing cultural norms that maintain gender stereotypes.

Too often, sexual harassment is normalized through cultural norms.

This occurs, for example, in work places, where women who refuse or report sexual advances are often degraded or forced to leave their jobs.

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We at United Nations have made it a priority to prevent and address sexual harassment and abuse of authority across our operations.

I urge all leaders here today to consider your responsibility towards promoting safe work places, safeguarding and protecting your staff.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The view that gender-based violence is a woman's issue is another harmful stereotype. Violence against women is also a man's issue.

People often assume that sexual violence is perpetrated mainly by strangers.

This is not the case.

Majority of physical, emotional, sexual and economical abuse takes place at home.

Most likely perpetrators are intimate partners and other family members.

Every one of us, and in particular, all men, must play our role in eliminating violence against women.

As a man privileged to be speaking on this special occasion, I call on men to be role models at home and at work.

And, I call on Members of Parliament to take a concrete action – to adopt the Law on Protection and Prevention of Violence against Women.

Distinguished guests,

I would like to acknowledge the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement for the organization of this national high-level event.

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I also want to acknowledge the strong participation of ministries and agencies at the central and local levels.

I would like to thank all development partners, embassies, UN Agencies, and media for providing support and technical assistance to making progress on gender equality and elimination of violence against women and girls.

The promise of the Sustainable Development Goals – to leave no one behind – cannot be fulfilled without ending violence against women.

The UN remains firmly committed to supporting the Government, civil society and other partners, to advance the status of women in Myanmar.

Thank you very much for your attention and participation.

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