

International Women's Day
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Message from Joanne Sandler
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This year on International Women's Day we have an opportunity to break new ground in the struggle for women's rights and gender equality, including the urgent need to end violence against women in all of its forms.

On 25 February, the UN Secretary-General announced the United Nations Campaign – UNiTE to End Violence against Women. For more than three decades, women's rights advocates have been working to place the urgency of ending violence against women on every national, regional, and international agenda. That work took a huge step forward with the kick-off of the campaign and the Secretary-General's personal pledge to bring in men and world leaders. It is the kind of high-level commitment that is so badly needed. The campaign will add value and visibility to the efforts that governments, women's and other civil society organizations, UN and donor partners are making to combat gender-based violence and send the message that ending violence against women stands on par with other critical development goals.

In line with the Secretary-General's campaign, UNIFEM is expanding its advocacy and fund raising efforts on behalf of the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, which UNIFEM manages. The UN Trust Fund is a vital complement to our work in all regions and all contexts to end sexual and gender-based violence in women's lives, in both conflict and non-conflict situations. Its resource base has expanded significantly over the last year--from \$3.5 million in 2006 to over \$15 million in 2007. To build on this success and on the momentum from the Secretary-General's campaign, we have set an ambitious goal: raising \$100 million a year by 2015.

We are also promoting a way for people everywhere to speak out and demand an end to violence against women. Last year, on November 25th, we initiated an internet-based advocacy effort *Say NO to Violence against Women* (www.saynotoviolence.org), with UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador Nicole Kidman in the lead. Today, as more and more people add their names, we can see a growing movement of people who are demanding an end to violence, including governments, UN partners and celebrities Catherine Deneuve and Hillary Swank. The entire cabinet of Senegal, led by President Abdoulaye Wade, has signed on; the UN Deputy Secretary-General has lent her name; and people are signing from every corner of the globe. The signatures will be presented to the Secretary-General in November as an expression of widespread public support to his efforts.

The United Nations Campaign to End Violence against Women comes at a time when the world's leaders are renewing their commitment to financing for all national development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As a vital part of this, the Commission on the Status of Women, in its 52nd Session has taken up the issue of Financing for Gender Equality. As the Secretary-General has stated, increased resources invested in achieving Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment is central to achieving all other development goals. Investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth.

In the months that follow, it is important that this forward action on ending violence against women and financing gender equality come together-- to Finance an End to Violence against Women. Financing efforts that will contribute to ending gender-based violence in all contexts is central to financing gender equality and ultimately, financing development. Ending violence against women was a missing indicator in the MDGs, owing to the lack of comparable data. It is encouraging therefore that the United Nations has also committed to support countries to generate the data needed to monitor the extent of violence against women and girls. Together with proven evidence of what works and the financial and technical resources needed to support countries to meet the implementation challenge, there may indeed be an end in sight to the pandemic of violence against women and girls—and genuine progress on achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment.