

**ADDRESS BY:** Michel Sidibé, Executive Director, UNAIDS

**DATE:** 30 March 2009

**PLACE:** Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

**OCCASION:** Opening of the Global Symposium: Engaging Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality

Please check against delivery

## ***Pot-banging* for gender equality and universal access: scaling up our engagement with men and boys**

Ministers, distinguished colleagues and friends

It is a privilege to be with you today to open the global symposium, *Engaging Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality*.

Before we start, I would like to thank *Promundo* for hosting this event.

I also want to thank President Lula da Silva and the Special Secretary of Public Policies for Women, Minister Nicea Freire. Their commitment is putting Brazil at the forefront of the response against gender-based violence and the response to HIV in the region and globally.

I also extend my congratulations to Ines Alberdi, executive director of UNIFEM for the excellent report launched today. And to Purnima Mane the deputy director of UNFPA for her continued leadership and commitment.

### **Timely gathering**

This global symposium is timely and topical.

I was recently at the United Nations meeting on the Commission on the Status of Women focused on the AIDS response. It clearly showed that in order for us to reach universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, we must ensure women and men are equal parts of this response.

This response must end violence against women and girls — as the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has demonstrated by launching a campaign a year ago calling for unity on this global priority.

### **Pots and pans**

Permit me to tell you a story about pots and pans.

One day, a well-respected teacher slapped his wife. The beatings escalated over a period of weeks. The woman was briefly hospitalized. She got a protection order. But the beatings did not stop.

Then one day, at the urging of the woman's father, a group of neighbours gathered outside the couple's house and banged pots and pans to protest the abuse.

They sent a powerful message: the violence was not invisible, not a "private affair"— and the community would NOT tolerate it any longer.

Even though these were fictional characters in a popular South African TV show<sup>1</sup> – the show was so effective that afterwards there were pot-banging protests in several communities.

### **Why do I tell this story**

Why do I tell you this story? It takes bold, collective action to begin to change social norms such as gender-based violence.

In this story the woman's father rallied the community to protest the violence, which illustrates the positive role men can play in bringing about change.

Friends, my message to you today is that we need strong social movements with the leadership and participation of both men and women to overcome gender inequality. To end to sexual violence. And to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

### **Gender-based violence**

In some countries, rape and domestic abuse is so engrained in the fabric of society— that there is no name or legal definition<sup>23</sup>.

We have learned to ignore the fear that women and girls live with every single day. The facts are sobering. Worldwide, an estimated one in five women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape<sup>4</sup>.

One in three will have been beaten or forced into sex—usually by a family member or an acquaintance<sup>5</sup>. In Brazil, police logged more than 24,000 incidents of domestic violence in 2008 alone<sup>6</sup>. In South Africa, one in four women report being abused by an intimate partner – and every six hours a woman is killed<sup>7</sup>.

### **Gender based violence and HIV**

Evidence tells us that sexual violence plays a direct and an indirect role in the transmission of HIV. It is a critical obstacle to the goal of Universal Access.

Social movements hold the key to breaking the cycles of gender-based violence. As difficult as it may be to break the cycles of gender-based violence in our societies, we know that change is possible.

Gay activists shattered the silence, forced AIDS onto the global agenda. Women's organizations have opened doors and minds shut by prejudice and privilege. Across Latin America we have seen how movements of indigenous peoples have shifted the balance of power.

Brazil's AIDS Programme is fueled and inspired by AIDS activists, women's organizations, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender organizations and now increasingly a growing movement engaging with men and boys.

Here I want to applaud the inspiring work of *Promundo* and its highly effective approach of working with men and boys is making a difference not only in Brazil. I look forward to joining forces to strengthen national AIDS responses.

From this pilot projects we know some of the ways to engage with men and boys. What we need now are concrete ways of scaling up successful grassroots programmes in order to make a difference for millions.

But scaling up cannot be accomplished in isolation. Our global crisis is not just an economic meltdown. Hitting a “re-start button” to go back to business as usual—is not an option.

We must connect the dots between daily life and human intimacy and the over-arching dynamics of global survival. My call is for new thinking and bold action – starting with gender equality.

#### **Four action points**

Let me offer four action points.

First, we must all work over the long term to end the social acceptance of violence against women and the gender inequality that underpins it. This means we must empower women and support their organizations and movements. Enforce laws and hold national programs accountable for concrete results.

Second, we must engage with men and boys to promote awareness of the need for a “new masculinity”. The “men’s movement” is still in its early days and needs to be supported. We need to share good practices. Scale-up small-scale projects. Promote gender-sensitive education in schools. And push National AIDS Programs to engage with men and boys especially in HIV prevention efforts.

Third, let us not work in isolation but encourage and support collaboration between women’s and men’s organizations.

The fundamental changes we urgently need – will only happen if the diverse social movements fighting for social justice come together and optimize new partnerships.

Fourth and last, let us “democratize problem-solving”. New, more equitable and inclusive decision-making is needed for economics and politics—for families and communities. This is especially important during an economic crisis.

We need our caring societies.

So—can I count of on you to keep banging on our “pots and pans”? Can we make lots of “noise” here in Rio? And at home too?

With our collective action against social injustice. We can change the world together!

Thank you!

[END]

**Contact:** Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 22 791 1697 | [bartonknotts@unaids.org](mailto:bartonknotts@unaids.org)

UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through UN theme groups, and joint programmes on AIDS. UNAIDS’ Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP,

UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

---

<sup>1</sup> Soul City: the Institute of Health and Development Communication. Website accessed on 30/03/09 at: <http://www.soulcity.org.za/programmes/advocacy>

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA, 2005, Domestic Violence in the Russian Federation: Ending the Silence. Accessed on 30/03/09 at [http://www.unfpa.org/gender/docs/fact\\_sheets/domestic\\_violence\\_russia.doc](http://www.unfpa.org/gender/docs/fact_sheets/domestic_violence_russia.doc)

<sup>3</sup> Amoakohene, M. A. 2004. "Violence Against Women in Ghana: A Look at Women's Perceptions and Review of Policy and Social Responses." *Social Science and Medicine* 59(2004): 2373-2385; Manh Loi, V., V. Tuan Huy, N. Huu Minh and C. Clement. 1999. "Gender Based Violence: The Case of Vietnam." Washington, D.C.: The World Bank; Garcia-Moreno, C. 2002. "Violence against Women: Consolidating a Public Health Agenda." Pp. 111-142 in: *Engendering International Health: The Challenge of Equity*, edited by G. Sen, A. George, and P. Ostlin. 2002. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press; and Koenig, M., et al. 2003. "Domestic Violence in Rural Uganda: Evidence From a Community-based Study." *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 81(1): 53-60

<sup>4</sup> UN Millennium Project. 2005a. *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*. Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. London and Sterling, Virginia: Earthscan.

<sup>5</sup> Heise, L., M. Ellsberg, and M. Gottemoeller. 1999. "Ending Violence against Women." *Population Reports*. Series L. No. 11. Baltimore, Maryland: Population Information Program, Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health.

<sup>6</sup> 2008 Human Rights Report: Brazil, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Accessed on 30/03/09 at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119150.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Jhumka Gupta, ScD MPH, Jay G. Silverman, PhD, David Hemenway, PhD, Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, PhD, Dan J. Stein, MD and David R. Williams, PhD Physical violence against intimate partners and related exposures to violence among South African men., *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 9 Sept 2008