



PRESS RELEASE

New Global Initiative to Make Cities Safer for Women

As cities grow, stopping threats to women and girls must be central to municipal development and safety. Cities that are safe for women and girls are safe for all.

New Delhi, 22 November 2010—UNIFEM (part of UN Women) today is launching an innovative Safe Cities programme in five cities around the world. Each will test new strategies to stop epidemic rates of violence against women and girls in urban areas.

An unprecedented 3.4 billion people now live in cities worldwide. Crime rates are high, but municipal development and safety plans frequently overlook specific threats to women and girls. The Global Safe Cities Free of Violence Against Women and Girls Programme is the first cross-regional initiative dedicated to making cities safer for them, while improving the quality of life for all city dwellers.

“Every day, women and adolescent girls face sexual harassment and violence as they go about their daily routines—whether on city streets, on buses and trains, or in their own neighborhoods,” said UNIFEM (part of UN Women) Executive Director Inés Alberdi. “This limits their freedom and rights to education, work, recreation and participation in political life.”

Alberdi introduced the Safe Cities programme at the Third International Conference on Women’s Safety, which opened here today. She emphasized that violence against women in private domains such as the home is increasingly recognized as a human rights violation. But violence against women in public spaces remains a largely neglected issue.

The Safe Cities programme will focus on slum areas and the poorest urban dwellers in Quito (Ecuador), Cairo (Egypt), New Delhi (India), Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) and Kigali (Rwanda). Each city will contribute to developing a comprehensive model for stopping the diverse forms of violence against women and girls. The model will be offered for adaptation by other cities around the world.

Separate launches of the programme will take place in each city. As an initial show of support for stopping sexual harassment and violence in public spaces, hundreds of people today gathered at the launch site to light candles symbolizing the end of impunity.

All five cities have strong support from local authorities, the potential for far-reaching engagement of civil society groups, and partnerships with agencies involved in ending gender-based violence, community safety, urban planning and development. They have committed to rigorous evaluations to demonstrate what works best.

Potential measures may include stronger laws and policies against violence in public spaces; training for urban planners, grass-roots women’s groups and police; special audits to identify unsafe areas; mass media campaigns on “zero tolerance” for violence against women; activities to engage local communities, men and adolescents of both sexes; and reviews of public sector budgets so that adequate resources are spent on making public areas safe for women and girls. Collecting reliable data will be an important aspect of the Safe Cities programme, because the

current lack of reliable and specific information on violence against women and girls in public space hides the problem and hampers the development of solutions.

The Safe Cities programme was inspired by a successful UNIFEM (part of UN Women) initiative in Latin America, which began with an experimental grant from the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women in 2004. Projects in seven countries subsequently raised a much higher level of awareness of urban violence against women and girls, and generated knowledge on how to stop it. This has encouraged municipalities to take actions such as improving lighting on streets and designing new municipal safety plans that focus on women and girls.

Globally, the Safe Cities programme contributes to the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE to End violence against women campaign and the Millennium Development Goals on gender equality and the rights of over 900 million slum dwellers.

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UNIFEM (part of UN Women) is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality. Placing the advancement of women's human rights at the centre of all of its efforts, UNIFEM focuses its activities on reducing feminized poverty; ending violence against women; reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls; and achieving gender equality in democratic governance in times of peace as well as war. For more information, visit www.unifem.org UNIFEM, 304 East 45th Street, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10017. Tel: +1 212 906-6400. Fax: +1 212 906-6705.