

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

MARCH 2008

Statement by Joanne Sandler, Ad Interim Executive Director, UNIFEM

SAAIDS Southern Africa
HIV/AIDS Information
Dissemination Service



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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 fundraising efforts on behalf of the [UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women](#), which UNIFEM manages on behalf of the UN system. 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 US\$3.5 million in 2006 to over US\$15 million in 2007. To build on this success and capitalize on the momentum from the Secretary-General's campaign, we have set an ambitious goal: raising US\$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](#), 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 *Continued on page 2*

Women Celebrate In Kanye

BOTSWANA—First Lady Barbra Mogae says men should embrace gender equality and stop being threatened by the rise of women. Speaking at the commemoration of World Women's Day in Kanye on Saturday, Mogae said that it was not true that giving women the same powers as men would make them look down upon their husbands.

"I know a lot of young successful women with PhDs driving luxury cars but still respect their husbands. Men should stop being threatened when they see women stand up for their rights. They have a right to be treated equally with their husbands and I see no reason why they should be apologetic about it," the First Lady said. She added that equality comes automatically if couples live in peace and respect each other's input when they make decisions. She said that time is ripe for men to realise that involving their partners in decision making can benefit their families and improve

their lives.

"All women are asking for is consultation not to take charge of men's lives. A man has to consult his wife about the cattle so that in case of death and illness it would be easy for her to manage them in the husband's absence," she said.

The First Lady stated that women who failed to respect their partners and engage in unpleasant activities should not hide behind the equality issue. Mogae said that while government and the nation is trying hard to have more women involved in politics and taking up leadership positions, it is disappointing that women had a tendency to bring each other down.

"At times women are their own enemies. We should stand up for each other and support each other's endeavours instead of discouraging and bringing each other down," she said. She noted that while women seek

gender equality, they should not regard men as enemies because males need to be fully involved in helping women earn their respect and recognition.

Acting Director at the Department of Women Affairs, Tebatso Menyatso told the gathering that the government is trying to tackle problems and challenges facing women.

"As we all know, those affected mostly by poverty are women and one of our mandate is to find out why and try to come up with solutions. Most women are involved in voluntary work while some are working without any pay. We also know that women are often left to look after children while men have a chance to work for money and we are trying to level the ground," Menyatso said.

She said that her department often involves men in search of solutions to problems facing women. At times women are still blamed when they fall victim to crimes such as rape.

"We do not feel pain until such things happen to us. But we should stop saying things like she was raped because she was wearing a mini skirt because tomorrow it could be you or your daughter," she said.

She told the gathering that a Women's Affairs office will be opened in Kanye in April. Currently there are only seven offices in Gaborone, Kasane, Francistown, Maun, Tsabong, Gaantsi and Serowe

<http://www.mmegi.bw/2008/March/Monday10/8.php>

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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 assist countries in efforts to generate the data needed to measure 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.

http://www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=661

Rural Women the Losers in HIV Response

SOUTH AFRICA—Amnesty International today revealed the extent of the impact of HIV and AIDS on poor rural women in South Africa with a [major new report](#) about the overwhelming challenges facing rural women in the midst of the severe HIV epidemic affecting the country.

The report, based on interviews with rural women living with HIV, describes oppression faced by rural South African women in their relationships with male partners and within the wider community because of their gender, HIV status and economic marginalization.

"Rural women in South Africa are disproportionately affected by poverty and unemployment," said Mary Rayner, Amnesty International's South Africa researcher.

"They continue to experience discriminatory attitudes and practices - particularly from male partners - and live in an environment rife with high levels of sexual and other gender-based violence."

Despite gradual improvements in the government's response to the HIV epidemic and the adoption of a widely-welcomed five-year plan, five and a half million South Africans are HIV-infected - one of the highest numbers in any country in the world. Fifty-five percent of them are women. South African women under 25 are three to four times more likely to be HIV-infected than men in the same age group.

Many women interviewed by Amnesty International said that they were often unable to protect themselves against HIV infection because they felt at risk of violence when they suggested condom use. One woman told Amnesty International that her husband, a truck driver, spent much of his time on the road. On his days off, he would visit her but refused to use condoms when she asked him. After he abandoned the family, she became sick

and discovered at the local clinic that she was infected with HIV. She has no knowledge of her husband's health since he left the family.

Several other women interviewed by Amnesty International described being beaten and forced to have sex by husbands who actively refused to use condoms.

"Rural South African women's lives are scarred by persistent violence in their families, homes and in under-policed, unsafe communities," said Michelle Kagari, Deputy Director of AI's Africa Programme.

"The co-existence of epidemics of both HIV and violence against women has raised the costs of violence for South African women and girls - both physically and psychologically," said Kagari

While there are many good reasons to increase testing for HIV across South Africa, the situation is complicated in a context of gender inequality and violence, poverty and social stigma. Women are currently tested in greater numbers than men currently. When they receive limited psycho-social support, disclosing their status can leave them vulnerable to abandonment, threats of violence and other consequences of stigma and discrimination.

The great majority of rural women interviewed by Amnesty International said that their male partners were reluctant to test for HIV or refused to be tested - even when there were strong indications the men might be HIV-infected.

Many of the women faced abuse from their partners when they tried to access health services for HIV-related treatment and care.

"When a woman's partner is in denial about his own HIV status, he may resent her going to the clinic or taking medication," said Rayner.

"In the context of pervasive gender inequalities, stigma and violence facing women, particular attention must be paid by those providing HIV testing to anticipate and address possible adverse consequences for women once they disclose their HIV positive status and start treatment." Effective treatment for HIV and AIDS requires regular visits to hospitals and clinics for treatment and care. Women also need adequate daily food with which to take their medication. Rural women living with HIV in circumstances of poverty and unemployment face constant challenges in having regular access to food and often cannot afford transportation to health facilities accredited to provide treatment.

"Lack of physical access to treatment centres is tantamount to a denial of access to health care services, and the government must take more responsibility in ensuring this access," said Michelle Kagari.

Also hampering treatment in rural areas is the fact that South Africa's health system is currently facing severe shortages of essential medical and other staff necessary for providing a comprehensive service - particularly in these areas.

Amnesty International's report offers specific recommendations to national and provincial authorities on how to tackle the challenges facing rural women living with HIV. It also makes recommendations to donor countries and institutions that support health initiatives in South Africa.

"It is only with considerable difficulty and great determination that rural women manage to continue their treatment and try to improve their health - and the government has a responsibility to help them in this struggle."

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200803180010.html>

Saluting women as caregivers

By Libuseng Nyaka

LESOTHO - Yes, women deserve to have Women's Day while men do not! We do not need that since men have always been at an advantage, they have always been in power.

This month we are celebrating women's social, economic and political achievements worldwide. Let us not forget the contribution made by our women folks in the rural areas as they give daily care to sick people. Out there they are doing remarkable work, which remains unnoticed by people in power. I say this because from dawn to dusk women will still be working voluntarily without receiving any payment for their effort. The women I am referring to are those who have gathered and formed support groups where they assist sick people, mostly people living with HIV and AIDS.

They have taken it upon themselves to carry the burden of care giving for every patient in the vil-

lages. This they happily do, not because someone would have forced them to but merely out of love. They voluntarily undertake the daily routine of checking on every patient in the village where they bath the sick and wash their clothes.

There are few men who have joined such groups. Men only chip in where a male patient needs to be bathed or where muscle power is needed. But the burden of work lies in the hands of women. They always make sure that the patient has taken the prescribed medication according to the doctor's advice. If there are people who need to be respected and paid handsomely, it is these women. They are sometimes away from their own homes whenever one of the patients in the village does not feel well. But why do their efforts pass unnoticed? Should we really only value those who have certificates and work as professional nurses?

These women are the people who need our sincere honour for they have put their own health at risk. Sometimes they even dig into their own pockets to assist in buying some of the requirements needed in taking care of the sick.

However, I am not suggesting that we forget those men who devote their energies in assisting these women. In this country like in any other HIV and AIDS affects everybody. You may not be infected but you will be affected in one way or the other. Of late I have learnt that there are certain support groups that have been registered, but they still suffer the same way as those that are not registered. Their only luck is that whenever there is a donation they are the first to be considered. Why do things have to be like this? I real feel obliged to salute the enduring women for their love, devotion and commitment. These women apply themselves whole-heartedly but why are they not paid?

<http://www.publiceye.co.ls/columns/story.asp?id=235>

Namibians Mark Global Women's Day

NAMIBIA—NAMIBIAN women marked International Women's Day in Windhoek on Saturday with music and speeches, and displayed works of art calling for an end to gender-based violence.

Representatives from various regions in Namibia gathered at Zoo Park in the city centre for the event, which was organised by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare.

Speakers included Finance Minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila, who spoke about doors Government had opened to enable

women to venture into business and development as strong and empowered individuals. At the same time, she called for hard work and enhanced unity of purpose amongst Namibian women.

"I urge all Namibian women to support each other if we want to succeed in life be it in leadership or business.

[We need] to unite and overcome the challenges faced by women such as limited financial and material resources, inadequate skills in marketing products and services, limited access to credit facilities,

limited access to entrepreneurial, managerial and technical skills as well as inadequate business organisational skills," she said.

"If we, as women, overcome these challenges, then we will be able to uplift the living conditions of those women who are the poorest of the poor," she added.

International Women's Day is observed on March 8 every year. Eliminating violence against women remains one of the most urgent calls on the day.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200803120511.html>

World Women Speak Out

By Amie Sillah - New York

CSW 52 Theme: Financing Gender Equality and Empowering Women: What is the commission on the status of women? The CSW provides a distinct place in the UN agenda that is entirely devoted to examining the state of progress for women.

Women still comprise the majority of the world's absolute poor and those without access to education. Additionally, disparities in equal pay for equal work, unpaid work, continued high maternal mortality, prominent HIV infection rates and a pandemic of violence against women are clear indicators that our commitments to these gender specific issues must be redoubled. The special needs

of all women, young girls to older women, must be recognized in a context of clear-cut human rights.

"This year's theme financing for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women highlights the necessity for ensuring that women are a part of the financial process at all levels. More than political will is necessary; it is the financial resources that makes the commitment a reality. We have reached a point where many member states have pledged their support but now we need action. And for this, women have to be at the table, lead the process, lending their voices, their experiences and their unique perspectives. Women must have the tools and the training and the will neces-

sary to achieve financial equality. Political will must translate into financial commitment" says the delegates and Expert Group Report at CSW 52.

It was an exciting and rewarding two weeks, a time of great optimism and energy. It was also very productive as the women of the world bring their expertise and experience to the meetings and share them with others who have come from around the world.

The trip was sponsored by African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies. (ACDHRS).

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200803140627.html>

Women Key to Millennium Development Goals, Says Migiro

Efforts to meet international development goals must focus on empowering women, Deputy UN Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said in a speech delivered at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

"Empowering women is not just an end in itself; it is a prerequisite for reaching all of the Millennium Development Goals - our common vision to build a better world in the 21st century," she said of the targets, known as MDGs, that aim to slash a host of global ills by 2015.

At the moment, the news is quite sobering, she said: systematic discrimination against girls and women in the world's poorest countries will make it impossible

for these states to meet the priority goal to halve the number of people living in extreme poverty by that year.

"Women and girls form the majority of the world's poor and hungry; girls are dropping out of primary school at rates far greater than boys, and the spread of HIV disproportionately affects women and girls," Ms. Migiro said, adding that efforts to cut maternal mortality rates were also lagging.

As national legal structures were still not adequately addressing this situation, women's leadership was crucial, she said.

In that context, the Deputy Secretary-General noted that MDG number three; promoting gender

equality and women's empowerment, recognised this by including an indicator for women's political leadership.

To achieve this, it was crucial to promote affirmative action, human rights protection and leadership training, including apprenticeship programmes for young women in political parties, as well as programmes to develop a "women's manifesto of policy priorities. In addition, she said, it was imperative to boost women's economic leadership and to protect women against violence.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200803141007.html>

Putting Women's Rights at the Centre

By Lois B. Chingandu
Executive Director of SAfAIDS

As the world commemorates the International Women's Day, SAfAIDS is calling upon decision makers to take urgent and practical action to ensure that women's rights are an essential foundation for achieving gender equity. It is time to walk to the talk!

Every year the 8th of March is a day that women should celebrate their gains in the women's movements efforts world wide. Indeed there is reason to celebrate when we think of those many years ago and the lives of women then; "zero" rights, no right to vote, lower wages in the workplace, poor working conditions and the belief that a woman is an inferior human being who is only useful in the kitchen. Yes, we have come a long way. International Women's day is also a day to look over the horizon to see where we are going, understanding that the road we have walked and are yet to walk is still not an easy one. Today we have succeeded to make the women taste what freedom and empowerment is although it still remains for many at arm's length. Many women are yet to really grasp it. The progress made thus far needs to be consolidated and sustained for future generations while new progress must be forged in those areas that remain a barrier to achieving gender equity when women can enjoy their rights to the full.

While the national HIV prevalence rates for most countries in sub-Saharan Africa are either stabilizing or declining, girls and young women between (15-25years) continue to be disproportionately vulnerable to HIV and AIDS in comparison to their male counterparts. In sub Saharan Africa women and adolescent girls account for 61% of the 22.5 million people living with HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS 2007).

Deeply entrenched gender inequalities that include; lack of control over

sexual decisions which include the decision whether to use condoms or not, persistent HIV related stigma and discrimination hindering testing and people's ability to know their status, gender discriminatory beliefs among families, communities and service providers reflecting and accepting the inferior legal, cultural and socio economic status of women and poverty all perpetuate the HIV and AIDS pandemic in all the hyper-endemic countries in southern Africa

If the man is sick it is seen as a stroke of bad luck- he is given sympathy and not blamed. Mothers are blamed for infecting their babies, older woman are blamed for infecting younger men, girls are accused of infecting older men while cross border and seasonal women workers are blamed for bringing HIV and AIDS into the town, community and home (women key informant on stigma and discriminations, Zambia and Tanzania 2006). This is the plight of women in Africa

Most governments have promised and committed to ensuring the rights of women and girls through legal frameworks of international human rights. However the feminization of the epidemic and the fact that poverty has the face of a woman are all clear evidence of the failures of government efforts to meaningfully deliver on the promises. Gender inequality, violence against women, multiple concurrent partnerships, and poverty are critical drivers of the epidemic. Already existing societal prejudice, social stereotypes and existing lines of inequality and marginalization make women and girls to suffer multiple or double or triple stigmatization and increased vulnerability to HIV and AIDS.

This year's UN theme of "Investing in Women and Girls" the overall theme of "Shaping progress" are

befitting when one assumes that you can only invest in people that are living. Therefore as SAfAIDS we call upon governments to strengthen their commitments to keep women alive and healthy by reducing those factors that increase women's risk and vulnerability to HIV and AIDS and by making sure that women access treatment for HIV and AIDS. Access to treatment will not only save the mothers but it will prevent orphan hood giving children a chance to enjoy their childhood experiences especially the girl child with limited interruptions. We believe that these promises can best be delivered through a rights based approach that empowers women to take control of their bodies and lives and to be able to make informed reproductive choices regarding when and with whom to have sex, marry and have children.

Poverty and HIV and AIDS are inextricably tied to women's rights as women have limited control over household income and assets resulting in economic dependency of many women and girls on men giving them little power to negotiate safe sex even when partners are openly unfaithful. Poverty undermines women's ability to fight HIV and AIDS. Women must be supported with meaningful income generating efforts that go beyond rearing of "two" chickens or a sewing machine to make a few uniforms to real enterprises that will put economic resources into the hands of women. Menial income generating activities contribute to poverty as they take the woman away from other more profitable activities like food growing and processing. Governments must provide social protection to protect women from sinking into deeper poverty during times of crisis like illnesses. Women must be remunerated for the care work that they

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have been doing in the last 25 years.

While legal frameworks exist that give women the right to own and inherit property, cultural and traditional beliefs, property grabbing and disputes with husbands' families continue to interfere with women's ability to keep



News in Focus is a publication of the SAfAIDS Media Resource Desk (MRD) and is produced to evaluate topical HIV and AIDS events and conferences in southern Africa.

For more information please contact :

Beatrice Tonhodzayi
SAfAIDS

Media Resource Desk
17 Beveridge road
Avondale, Harare
Zimbabwe

Phone: +263 4 336193/4 307098

Fax: +263 4 336195

Email:

mediadesk@safaids.org.zw

Website :

www.mediaresourcedesk.org

Please visit our website
<http://www.safaids.org.zw>

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their property leading to increased poverty. Traditional systems and structures need to be engaged in dialogues on the linkages between women's rights, HIV and AIDS, gender violence and poverty all which are intertwined. Modern laws and cultural laws must be harmonized so that women are not disadvantaged. SAfAIDS has been facilitating community dialogues in the region to increase awareness about the linkages and building community capacities to identify and implement their own solutions to their problems. This process has empowered women to speak about their problems and to work together with men to identify practical and locally grown solutions.

Investing in women must begin with investing in the education of the girl-child. Education plays a crucial role in empowering young women to take control of their sexual lives. Research has shown that educated girls are more likely to know the basic facts about HIV and AIDS, more empowered to negotiate safe sex, maybe more likely to delay sexual activities and are less likely to suffer from sexual and gender based violence (Kirby et al, 2004). The gains in education of the girl child achieved a few years ago in Southern Africa are being slowly reversed by HIV/AIDS as many girl children are dropping from school to care for the sick or to fend for younger siblings in child-headed households. These girls have a right to education despite their circumstances. Governments need to design other unconventional school systems so as to reach these girls with education in their homes or outside the formal school hours and terms.

Investing in women must include provision of technologies and medical interventions that put prevention in the hands of women which include female condoms, microbicides, post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and prevention of mother/

parent to child transmission plus (PMTCT+). These services must be integrated with other reproductive health services to minimize stigma and discrimination of women that need them and to ensure the right to privacy. Strengthening of health care systems in southern Africa is critical to ensure the right to quality health care for all women.

Lastly, investing in women means financing those organizations that work with women. The last few years has seen a decline in resources targeting specifically women organisations and women empowerment programmes. Governments and donors must provide predictable long term funding to scale up programmes that reflect women's rights, challenge gender norms and empower women to negotiate safer sex and reduce HIV and AIDS.

On this international women's day we want to acknowledge the existence of women special circumstances that are even further marginalized by the main line systems. These include women with disabilities, women in prisons, refugees, illegal migrants and commercial sex workers. These women deserve access to basic services including health and treatment for HIV and support for their children and families. We would like to join hands with others to call upon governments and donors to prioritize the needs and rights of these groups to reduce their risk to HIV and to increase their ability to cope with the impacts of the epidemic.

Let us as women use this day to reflect on our past and reenergize to continue to fight for our rights and the rights of those that cannot speak for themselves keeping in mind that in the absence of women's rights gender equity is not achievable and without gender equity the war against HIV and AIDS is far from being won.

Happy women's day!