



UNITED NATIONS
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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM TO END OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

UN calls for bolder and more concerted efforts to end violence against women in Somalia

Nairobi, 25 November 2008: In October 2008, 13-year-old Aisha Duhulow was stoned to death in Kismayu on allegations of adultery after having been attacked and raped by three men. This sad case brings to mind the many violations of the rights of Somali girls, women and children that go unchecked.

On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the UN strongly urges the Somali public, authorities and civil society to step up efforts to protect the rights of Somali girls and women against all forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

Violence against women is the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world. Gender-based violence both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity and security of its victims. Sexual abuse of children, rape, domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment and several harmful traditional practices, which increase HIV risks, leave deep psychological scars; damage the health of women and girls, and even lead to death.

Gender-based violence also serves – by intention or effect – to perpetuate male power and control. It is sustained by a culture of silence and denial of the seriousness of the consequences of abuse. In Somalia, the continued silence on the many crimes and violations against women and children only serves to perpetuate the practices, which are fueled by lawlessness and insecurity.

In Somalia, women and children continue to bear the brunt of the war. Women and girls as young as 2 years old are raped, but the perpetrators go unpunished. Throughout the country, lawlessness and insecurity hinder the building of strong judicial and health systems, which has devastating effects on women, other vulnerable populations, and the society as a whole.

The UN has zero tolerance on all forms of violence against women. The UN in Somalia is working on ending impunity, recognizing and responding to the needs of victims of violence against women, fostering social mobilization, and strengthening laws and policies in line with international agreements. The UN is putting every effort into breaking the silence and ensuring that the voices of women are heard.

More importantly, the UN recognizes the critical role that the Somali society itself must play in order to stem these practices. More men and young boys must speak out against gender-based violence. Young children especially boys must be taught that violence against women and girls is wrong. Homes, schools and places of worship should promote active dialogue on this issue.

Today kicks off the 16 Days of Activism to end violence against women and promote human rights for all. The UN urges authorities and civil society institutions to protect the rights of Somali women and children against all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Under no circumstances may a state or authority invoke reasons of custom, religion or tradition in order to justify violence against civilians, in particular women and girls.

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<http://www.somalia-un.org>, <http://endviolence.un.org>