

Joint Statement by Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women and H.E. Mr. Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti, Secretary-General of The Organisation of African, Caribbean And Pacific States

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Brussels, 10 December 2021/OACPS/UNWomen: Today we mark Human Rights Day, as the 2021 UNiTE campaign “[Orange the World: End Violence against Women Now](#) ^[1] concludes. We reaffirm together, in the face of continuing and even [increasing gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) ^[2], and in the global context of violent conflicts, that women’s rights are human rights. There are deep inter-connections between ending such blatant violations of those rights, providing freedom from fear, and the right to security, dignity, equality and justice.

The [new data released by UN Women](#) ^[2] highlight how the pandemic has impacted women’s safety at home and in public spaces. The report covers more than 16,000 women respondents from 13 countries. Its findings reinforce our understanding of current trends and underline the need to deploy our most successful approaches.

The situation has markedly deteriorated for women, especially young women, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study shows that nearly one in two women reported that they, or a woman they know, experienced some form of violence since the pandemic began. The most vulnerable group was younger women aged 18–39 years. About one in four women now feels less safe at home, with existing conflict increasing within households since the pandemic started. Outside their homes, women also report feeling more exposed to violence, with about three in five women pointing to a worsening in sexual harassment in public spaces since the onset of COVID-19.

Sadly, we also know that violence against women, in its many forms, remains largely unreported for multiple reasons. These include impunity, silencing, stigma, shame and fear of retaliation. These findings, of repeated violations of rights, and a reluctance to step forward to name them, are strong signals for action.

Violence against women is not inevitable. Successful approaches are comprehensive, including prevention; accelerating reforms of discriminatory legal frameworks; ensuring essential services are available and accessible to survivors, as well as boosting efforts to prosecute offenders. [Strong results](#) ^[3] have been achieved by the European Union and UN Spotlight Initiative in 25 countries, 18 of which are OACPS members. Recent evidence of these successful interventions in 2020 include a ‘One Stop Center’ in North-West Nigeria that has provided medical care, psychosocial and medical support to over 400 survivors of gender-based violence; support for access to justice in Malawi with mobile courts that were able to conclude 149

cases; and in Trinidad and Tobago, strengthened gender responsive policing to address the overall investigation and management of cases. In Haiti, over 4,000 people have been trained in successful behaviour change techniques targeting parents. Evaluations showed an increase of 47.6% in parents agreeing they should treat sons and daughters with equal consideration.

In total, in Spotlight Initiative partner countries last year, more than 650,000 women and girls were able to access gender-based violence services, despite restrictions related to the pandemic. We also saw a 22% increase in prosecution of perpetrators, with 84 laws and policies being passed or strengthened.

As we look forward with hope, we also reaffirm the will to work jointly. Building on the opportunities brought by the Generation Equality Forum, we strongly support the work of the [Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence](#) [4], together with women's groups, youth, civil society, faith-based institutions, philanthropy, private sector, international organizations and UN Member States.

With new opportunities arising, we will ensure that women's rights, gender equality and ending violence against women are at the forefront of our work towards the 2030 Agenda and as fundamental underpinnings of the UN Secretary-General's [Common Agenda](#) [5].

It is intolerable that in every country, women and girls still struggle to exercise their full human rights. This has to change. It is up to us all, together, to accelerate progress so that women and girls can live free from violence, everywhere and always.

Tags: [News articles](#) [6]

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Links:

[1] <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/16-days-of-activism>

[2] <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/vaw-rga>

[3] <https://spotlightinitiative.org/publications/spotlight-initiative-impact-report-2020-2021>

[4] <https://forum.generationequality.org/news/action-coalition-gender-based-violence-calls-all-actors-join-5-year-drive-eradicate-violence>

[5] <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/>

[6] <http://acp.int/category/story-type/news-articles>