

The Future of Violence against Women Post 2015

A Speech by Naomi Lawson

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to speak to you. My name is Naomi Lawson; I am a high school student and a representative for the National Alliance of Women's Organisations from the UK. Today I am going to speak to you about the importance of violence against women and girls and its significance in the post 2015 framework.

Violence against Women and Girls is a major threat to international development. With women representing 70% of the world's poor, the development emergency is first and foremost an emergency for women and girls.

Violence against women and girls forms the principle barrier to the realisation of the social, economic and political rights of women- and indeed members of their communities- thus the absence of this fundamental violation in the millennium development goals is profound. The inclusion of goal 3- on gender equality- remains futile when each indicator is deeply undermined by violence against women. This issue desperately needs to be addressed in the post 2015 framework in order to realise development targets, prevent the pervasion of disparities between the genders and allow women to attain their basic human rights.

In the goals set in 2000, women were lost. Although the need for gender parity was acknowledged in Goal 3's indicator on equality within all levels of education, the realisation of the increased opportunities for girls was- and continues to be- hindered by perpetuated violence against them. In recent reports examining the role of sexual violence in education, 23 per cent of girls reported experiencing sexual assault or rape travelling to school; in the United States 83 per cent of girls in between the ages of 12- 16 experienced some form of sexual harassment in school; in South Africa, 33 per cent of all reported rapes of girls were perpetrated by a teacher.

With 50 per cent of all sexual assaults directed against girls under 16 years old it is our responsibility to step in at an advanced level; protecting victims and those at risk alongside preventing the attacks of the next generation. We can't wait for girls to become empowered and make their own changes when it could soon be too late for anyone to protect or save them. Sexual violence deprives girls of their education and thus deprives them of

empowerment of their social and sexual rights, preventing them from progressing adequately in the future and trapping them in a cycle of abuse and poverty. Simply an extra year of secondary school increases a girl's potential income by 15 to 25%. Furthermore an increase of only 1% in girls secondary education attendance, adds 0.3% to a country's GDP and with 75 million girls around the world out of school, the boost to their domestic economies as well as their own personal earning potential as a result of education is huge.

The relationship between women and employment- the second indicator for Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals- is only too similar to that of girls and education. As a woman begins to work her ability to do so is hampered by sexual violence towards her, often manifested in the form of harmful traditional practices at childhood. This aspect of violence against women and girls reduces their capacity to engage in work and the community due to physical and psychological damage. According to a study in India, a woman loses an average of at least 5 paid work days for each incident of intimate partner violence which over a long period of time can amount to a serious loss to her financial independence, thus isolating her further and increasing her dependence on those around her- including her attackers.

Due to sexual violence against them, women aren't reaching the work that they should with employment only serving to increase a woman's risk to sexual violence and inequality. Workplaces don't serve as a protection from the threats to women that lie in their personal lives; in a study of domestic violence survivors, 74 percent of battered women were harassed by their partner while at work. Outside of these figures more than 29,000 acts of rape or sexual assault are perpetrated against women at work each year; between 40 and 50 percent of women in European Union countries experience unwanted sexual advances or harassment at work and across Asia, 30 to 40 percent of women suffer workplace sexual harassment. This is the just the formal sector. In order for the increase in equality in employment- especially the non agricultural sectors outlined under the MDG's- women need to be safe from persecution from both outside and within.

Nonetheless, women's participation in the political arena has been growing. By the end of January 2012, women accounted for 19.7 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide, an increase of 75 per cent since 1995. While trends point to an increase in women's parliamentary representation, the rate remains low overall and progress is disparate and uneven across the world particularly- and shockingly- in developed countries where it remains low, for example at around 18% in the United States.

Laws play an invaluable role in shaping society, helping to create new norms, bringing about and cementing social change. For example, where laws are in place to prohibit domestic violence, fewer people think violence against women can be justified. Boosting the number of legislators who are women is one of the key recommendations in working towards gender equality as shown in its position as the third indicator for the millennium development goal on gender equality. Yet despite the increase, it will take 40 years to reach parity at this pace. In that time, 29.2 million girls will be illegally aborted; 160million women and girls will be trafficked into situations of prostitution, forced labour or slavery and in Britain alone, 20.8 million women will be assaulted.

Just as increasing female parliamentarians doesn't guarantee gender equality legislation, being given equal rights under law does not guarantee them in practice. Women's rights and access to education, employment and political representation are limited not only due to legal discrimination, but because more subtle barriers such as their work load and low social status- but most significantly- violence against them, prevents them from accessing their legal rights.

The millennium development goals recognise that gender equality is necessary for international development, but achieving this equality requires the end of violence against women and girls. Gender-based violence is degenerative to our society: frustrating women's educational and employment opportunities, preventing social security and undermining human rights. Because of this, all attempts at real, systematic progress towards international development have been overshadowed, so I hope you join me in calling for the missing target of the Millennium Development Goals to be instated in the post 2015 framework.

We need to call for the implementation of new or amended legislation that strongly addresses violence against women and girls at every level. As secretary general Mr. Ban-Ki Moon said yesterday, sexual violence laws must be reinforced and enforced. The international community needs to ensure that this legislation is implemented fully and cohesively.

The inextricable link between violence against women and international development and other issues needs to be formally recognized to raise its significance on the world stage thus any formal framework needs to be grounded in this. We cannot move forward without addressing it.