

## International Women's Day 2010 Theme

"The "UNiTE to End Violence against Women" campaign that I launched last year is galvanizing action across the United Nations system. It calls for all countries to put in place, by the year 2015, strong laws, multi-sectoral action plans, preventive measures, data collection, and systematic efforts to address sexual violence in conflict situations. I invite Governments, organizations and individuals to join us in this Campaign. I have also just launched a Network of Men Leaders to strengthen our advocacy."

[Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women \(25 November 2009\)](#)

[United Nations support for the rights of women](#) began with the international framework declared in the UN Charter. Among the purposes of the UN declared in [Article 1](#) of its Charter is "To achieve international co-operation ... in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."

Within the UN's first year, the Economic and Social Council established its Commission on the Status of Women, as the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and advancement of women. Among its earliest accomplishments was ensuring gender neutral language in the draft [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

The landmark Declaration, adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December 1948, reaffirms that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, ... birth or other status." As the international feminist movement began to gain momentum during the 1970s, the General Assembly declared 1975 as the International Women's Year and organized the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City. At the urging of the Conference, it subsequently declared the years 1976-1985 as the UN Decade for Women, and established a Voluntary Fund for Decade.

In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW), which is often described as an International Bill of Rights for Women. In its 30 articles, the Convention explicitly defines discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations, and it is the first human rights treaty to affirm the reproductive rights of women.

Five years after the Mexico City conference, a Second World Conference on Women was held in Copenhagen in 1980. The resulting Programme of Action called for stronger national measures to ensure women's ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in women's rights with respect to inheritance, child custody and loss of nationality.

In 1985, the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, was held convened in Nairobi. It was convened at a time when the movement for gender equality had finally gained true global recognition, and 15,000 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated in a parallel NGO Forum. The event, which many described as "the birth of global feminism". Realizing that the goals of the Mexico City Conference had not been adequately met, the 157 participating governments adopted the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies to the Year 2000. It broke ground in declaring *all* issues to be women's issues.

An early result of the Nairobi Conference was the transformation of the Voluntary Fund for the UN Decade for Women into the UN Development Fund for Women ([UNIFEM](#)). A permanent, autonomous body in association with the UN Development Programme, UNIFEM provides direct support to women's development and empowerment projects around worldwide.

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, went a step farther than the Nairobi Conference. The [Beijing Platform for Action](#) asserted *women's rights as human rights* and committed to specific actions to ensure respect for those rights. According to the UN Division for Women in its [review of the four World Conferences](#):

"The fundamental transformation that took place in Beijing was the recognition of the need to shift the focus from women to the concept of gender, recognizing that the entire structure of society, and all relations between men and women within it, had to be re-evaluated. Only by such a fundamental restructuring of society and its institutions could women be fully empowered to take their rightful place as equal partners with men in all aspects of life. This change represented a strong reaffirmation that women's rights were human rights and that gender equality was an issue of universal concern, benefiting all."

In the aftermath of the Millennium Declaration of the September 2000 Millennium Summit, gender issues were integrated in many of the subsequent [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) — and explicitly in [Goal No. 3](#) (“Promote gender equality and empower women”) and [Goal No. 5](#) (“Reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio”). The UN system is mobilized to meet these goals.

In October 2000, the Security Council unanimously adopted a groundbreaking resolution on women, peace and security. [Resolution 1325](#) urged Member States to increase women’s representation at all decision-making levels for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict. It urged the Secretary-General to appoint more women as his special representatives and envoys, and to expand women’s role and contribution in UN field-based operations. The Council called on all actors involved in negotiating and implementing peace agreements to adopt a gender perspective. It also called on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence and all other forms of violence that occur in situations of armed conflict.

The UN system continues to give particular attention to the issue of violence against women. The 1993 General Assembly [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) contained “a clear and comprehensive definition of violence against women [and] a clear statement of the rights to be applied to ensure the elimination of violence against women in all its forms”. It represented “a commitment by States in respect of their responsibilities, and a commitment by the international community at large to the elimination of violence against women”.

In 2007, the theme of the International Women’s Day was “[Ending Impunity for Violence against Women and Girls](#)”. And on 25 February 2008, Mr. Ban Ki-moon launched “The Secretary-General’s Global Campaign, [UNiTE to End Violence Against Women](#)”. In opening the multi-year global campaign, he called violence against women an issue that “cannot wait”.

[International Women’s Day](#) is observed on 8 March. The theme of the 2009 observance was “Women and men united to end violence against women and girls”. The [International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) is observed on 25 November.

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