
UN Women have partnered with the women of the New York Police Department (NYPD) to highlight the need for the law to reach to wherever there is violence against women and girls and Sr. Anne Marie Quinn (PBVM) Executive Director of the International Presentation Association (IPA) was in attendance affirming our IPA commitments to addressing the issues of women and girls and also our commitment to the SDGs.

As in previous years, the United Nations Official Commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women will be held under the banner of the Secretary-General’s campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women. The Official Commemoration will aim to commemorate the day itself, raise awareness about the issue, highlight contributions to work and efforts to end violence against women and girls, and amplify current global advocacy messages.

The Secretary-General has been invited to participate in the event as the keynote speaker together with a series of speakers who will discuss the theme of #OrangeTheWorld: #HearMeToo on how organisations and individuals are standing in solidarity with survivor advocates, the women’s movement and women’s human rights defenders.

The Official Commemoration marks the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which aims to build a global momentum and amplify the voices of movements that work to prevent and end violence against women and girls around the world.

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. (Photo) Valentine Rugwabiza Rwanda Permanent Representative to the UN & Ambassador Geraldine Byrnes Nason and Sr. Anne Marie Quinn PBVM Executive Director IPA.

Under Secretary General Drennan noted and commented upon that there was a lack of men at this meeting and to him; this was as a real pity. Over a billion women worldwide in 2013 have experienced violence and we know too that violence against women is vastly under-reported. What of our response to the survivors. The quality of the UN response can have a huge bearing on the future inclusivity of those who have been abused. Women must feel safe, listened to, understood and feel that their experience will inform policy that will benefit those others who, as of yet have not found their voice. Ending such violence is, simply put, the right thing to do. All UN machinery must be gender proofed to be a welcoming, supportive and understanding space for all women especially those who suffer violence. There is still much to do, not just at the UN, but in governments, policing, soldiering, civil society and leadership. It is critical to ensure that we make the necessary gains. Ending violence against women is everybody’s responsibility but especially the responsibility of every man. It is also the smart this to do.

Mr Benjamin Tucker from the NYPD spoke on recognising women in the police force. Over the last 5 decades the NYPD has benefitted from the experience of wise women among their ranks. 18 % (6475) members of the police are women and in the civilian ranks, 68% (13116) and all in all 19591 are women. This number is increasing and raising the awareness of women’s health and violence against women is a vital component in order to be able to assist when we respond to issues of abuse in our work situations. There was a subsequent panel discussion on policing and how the police have an important role in ending violence against women.
In Rwanda (Rwandan Ambassador to the Permanent Mission of the UN, photographed above) There are three areas of note in the battle to combat violence against women. Firstly, increase the number of women in the judiciary, this is hugely important. This helped women to report who previously may have felt unsure. Secondly, the survivors must feel sufficiently comfortable to give their account so that the victim would not be re-traumatised. And thirdly, Rwanda created gender based violence communities for people so that those living in communities would have others in their own communities that they could speak with and who would be prepared to listen. A very important institution is the one-stop centre (now 45 in Rwanda) in bringing all the services under one roof in all that is encompassed in violence against women. It involves self-shelter, medical, legal, psychological support and complete refuge. This has meant an increase in reporting by up to 50%. Silence and stigma are the main challenges but are beginning to be overcome. Nearly always the perpetrator is forgotten but everyone will remember the victim and this stigmatisation must be brought to an end. Rwanda is creating “A refuge to re-find ourselves”

Ambassador Geraldine Byrnes Nason on Irish Women entering the police force: “Raising voices is raising hope” and this is important. She recognises all the Irish in the NYPD and will chair the Council on the Status of Women, which deals with the reality of women’s lives. “Wearing the Orange” means that we are signed up to action. She referenced the Garda Siochana (Guardians of the Peace) with 28% women in the force. 14% of Irish society is non-Irish born so Ireland is trying to recruit more women and now more non-Irish into the police force. Ireland has quite a few women in leadership in the policing and the judiciary. We cannot just add women and stir to make the police force more sensitive, we must do much more and in this way we offer training so that more women will feel more comfortable in reporting all manner of abuse. We must continue to draw attention to the hidden pain that is violence against women. What would you do? (A strong successful video message that is resonating throughout Ireland at present). Orange in the world is also about changing the symbols of power.

“It is our collective responsibility that the world is a better & safer place for women & girls.” Executive Director @UN_Women #HearMeToo #orangetheworld #16days Today is a teaching moment for all of us. She invited all women in uniform to stand up and urged them to continue in their good work to make the world a better place for all.

Part II

How can we work to end violence? What is our individual responsibility? We must more than recognise the pain. We have an opportunity to build on the work of survivors that bravely came forward. The_UNiTE_campaign #OrangeTheWorld #HearMeToo

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés is the current President of the United Nations General Assembly for the 73rd session. How are we today? And the response was “ORANGE” from the #HearMeToo campaign. The choir of the Angel Band Project are set to perform and were welcomed and she has dedicated her Presidency to women and girls because the numbers speak for themselves. 35% have experienced physical or sexual violence. 7% have been assaulted by someone other than a partner, as many as 38% of murders have been committed by a partner, 200million girls have suffered FGM, 1 in 10 has experienced forced sexual attacks. Violence against women and girls is a serious violation against Human Rights. Violence against women can cost a country up to 3.7% of their GDP. We are still far away from achieving the elimination of violence against women and girls. We
are now seeing a global change empowered by women to help give voice to the voiceless. We must hear the stories of all women. The theme of this day is #HearMeToo. We need to invest more in changing stereotypes and in changing practices and invest in same. We must join forces in coalition with all stakeholders and pledge not to sit still until we have eliminated all forms of violence against women and girls.

Antonio Gutteres, UN Secretary-General. “Violence against women is a global pandemic, it is a mark of shame on all our Societies. Violence against women and girls is a profound sign of disrespect. It has far reaching consequences in the life of abuses women and violence against younger girls lasts well into adulthood. We live in a male dominated world, women are made vulnerable to violence through the multiple ways in which we keep them unequal. We also impede women’s ability to leave abusive situations. With orange as the colour of solidarity and #HearMeToo, it is designed to send a clear message. Violence against women and girls must stop now, and we all have a role to play. We must do more and examine how we must address the imbalances within our own institutions. Gender parity on UN Leadership is well on track to be in place by 2021. We are committed to the SDGs in its aim to end all violence against women and girls worldwide. We will not alone, create a space for all to tell their stories, but they will become agents of change”. "Not until the half of our population represented by women and girls can live free of fear, free of violence and everyday insecurity, can we truly say we live in a fair and equal world."

When survivors take the centre stage we can recognise a change in how we do our business. There is so much going on and so much that we have yet to hear about. The hand of the law must reach out wherever there is a tolerance of violence against women. All of us are part of making sure that we end the culture that facilitates violence against women and girls and the silence that exists and thrives therein.

Danii a young Downs Syndrome girl had her UN debut and she spoke so well. “My dream is to group together with my colleagues from work to learn. I go to a day centre that helps me to wash and it makes me happy and it makes my friends happy and I have a photography project of a calendar that I will give to the President. I work on the farm; I help the bakers in the afternoon and work in the kitchen. I help prepare the communion and I would love to meet Lionel Messi as I love football. I work from 8am – 3pm”.

“I have the same rights and thank you to the UN for teaching me what my rights are”

The choir (The Angel Band Project) performed One Voice at 1:50:20 Take the time to watch this it’s powerful. A panel discussion followed on the rights of the vulnerable using the law, technology, social media to weaken the grip that some have on women. We must tackle systemic and structural injustice that perpetuates violence against women and this is done with education. One word to describe what you heard today from each of the panellists. “Take consent seriously”, “Working Together”, “Act in Solidarity”, “Change is possible”. In closing: Gender Violence is a complex problem requiring a comprehensive answer and it needs all to solve it. Thanks to the lawyers who have brought to the fore the issue of consent. It is this work that has changed the narrative that has brought us from a time where domestic violence was not a crime to where we are now, but we have a long way to go. So remember #HearMeToo #OrangeTheWorld #WeMustShowUp