



11 October 2014 - Girls in Haiti walking to fetch water sometimes wear five pairs of jeans to avoid being raped. In every country, all around the world, females take extraordinary precautions to avoid being assaulted, harassed, violated or abused only because of their gender.

A group of United Nations human rights experts* now call on States to step up a gear in the fight against all forms of violence against girls. As we celebrate the [International Day of the Girl Child](#) on October 11, the theme is "Empowering adolescent girls: Ending the cycle of violence".

As the experts point out in a joint statement, violence against girls and women occurs on a continuum whether in times of peace, conflict, post-conflict or transitions. Rape and domestic violence in fact constitute a higher risk for females than cancer, traffic accidents or malaria.

"When adolescent girls are empowered, it benefits all", [says](#) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. "My [UNiTE to End Violence against Women](#) campaign is engaging governments, international organizations, civil society groups, the media and citizens everywhere to raise awareness and increase political will and resources for preventing and ending violence against women and girls. A parallel campaign –

[HeForShe](#)

– emphasizes that gender equality is not just a women’s issue by enrolling males to act against all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls.”

Empowering girls and women remains first and foremost a matter of education, a fact underscored by the [Nobel Committee](#) as they awarded Pakistani child education activist Malala Yousafzai with the [Nobel Peace Prize](#) together with and Kailash Satyarthi, an Indian child rights campaigner. At the age of just 17, Malala is the youngest recipient of the prize. She was shot in the head by Taliban gunmen in October 2012 for campaigning for girls' education.

The UN experts urge Governments, the UN system, civil society, and public and private institutions to “focus on the critical period of adolescence, when key investments and support can set girls on a path towards empowerment, through among others, access to education, reproductive and sexual health, social and economic support, and participation in civic, economic and political life.”

The culture of impunity that allows violence against adolescent girls to continue unabated, must be brought to an end. “There is one universal truth”, says Ban, “applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable”.

Around 120 million girls under the age of 20 around the world (about 1 in 10) have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts, and one in three ever-married adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 (84 million) have been victims of emotional, physical or sexual violence committed by their husbands or partners.

In 53 countries, there is no legal protection for women against domestic violence, and marital rape is not prosecutable.

(*) The experts:

Urmila Bhoola, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, its causes and consequences

Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children

Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

Frances Raday, Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against

women in law and in practice

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