



WFP Says NO to Violence Against Women

WFP food assistance protects women



25 November 2009

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

“Women are the most vulnerable to hunger and are at the heart of all hunger solutions. Hunger can expose women and girls to abuse, rape and violence. WFP works in careful and innovative ways to ensure the empowerment and protection of women through its food assistance activities.”

WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran

Violence against Women and Girls

Violence against women takes many forms: physical, sexual, psychological and economic. Its consequences and costs are far-reaching and long-lasting: women who experience violence suffer a range of health problems and their ability to participate in public life is diminished. Violence against women harms and impoverishes women, their families, communities and nations.

How widespread is violence against women and girls?

- **Physical violence** – The most common form of violence against women, most often inflicted by an intimate partner. At least one in every three women is beaten, coerced into sex or abused by an intimate partner in her lifetime.
- **Rape** – Is often used as a weapon of war: between 250,000 and 500,000 women were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Worldwide, one in every five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime.
- **Trafficking** – Between 500,000 and 2 million people, the majority of them women and children, are trafficked annually into prostitution,

How does WFP address violence against women and girls?

Food assistance is a direct protection tool

Extreme poverty often forces women and girls to resort to negative survival mechanisms, such as transactional sex, to feed themselves and their children. Food assistance prevents them from resorting to these harmful practices.

Supporting female victims of violence

WFP’s food assistance supports female victims of violence in several ways. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC):

- WFP’s food rations improve the capacity of hospitals to give victims sufficient recovery time.

- WFP’s food-for-training programmes enable female survivors of violence to develop income generating skills and become financially independent.



Keeping girls in school

WFP gives girls who attend school additional food rations to bring back to their families. This provides an economic incentive to keep girls in school while reducing



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forced labour, slavery or servitude.

- **Early marriage** – Worldwide, young girls are forced into marriage and into sexual relations, causing health risks including HIV/AIDS and limiting their attendance in school.
- **Female infanticide** – Prenatal sex selection and systematic neglect of girls are widespread in South and East Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East
- **Sexual harassment** – Women experience sexual harassment throughout their lives. In Malawi, 50 percent of schoolgirls surveyed reported sexual harassment at school.
- **Dowry murder** – A woman is killed by her husband or in-laws because her family cannot meet their demands for dowry. This is prevalent worldwide, but occurs predominantly in South Asia.
- **Honour killings** – A woman rape victim, suspected of engaging in pre-marital sex or accused of adultery is murdered by her relatives because this is seen as an affront to the family's honour. There are about 5,000 victims of "honour killings" annually (UNFPA).
- **Female genital mutilation (FGM)** – A traditional cutting operation performed on women and girls. More than 130 million women and girls alive today have undergone FGM, mainly in Africa and in Middle Eastern countries.

(United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign fact sheet for UNITE to end Violence Against Women and Girls is available at <http://endviolence.un.org/>)

their exposure to violence and protecting them from early marriages and pregnancies.

Building staff capacity on protection

WFP supports country offices to analyse protection challenges including gender-based violence and sexual abuses faced by women beneficiaries, and to develop responses to these challenges.

Implementing a zero-tolerance policy to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)

WFP has established specific management responses, including Executive Director's Circulars and SEA focal points in field offices that establish a zero-tolerance policy to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Reducing women and girls' exposure to dangerous situations in camps

WFP has identified as a priority area of action of its 2009 gender



policy the need to improve the safety of women and girls in camps. Going forward, WFP will:

- mobilize resources to provide fuel-efficient stoves to the most vulnerable women;
- support the creation of safe and private spaces for women and girls; and
- use food assistance to involve men and boys in activities to protect women and children from violence.

"We must unite.

Violence against women cannot be tolerated, in any form, in any context, in any circumstance, by any political leader or by any government."

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon



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For more information visit www.wfp.org and www.un.org/en/women/endviolence