



**Speech by Michelle Bachelet
Executive Director of UN Women
Special Session for Executive Board members on Building Safe Cities for
Women and Girls
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We are meeting at a time when momentum for change to end violence against women and girls is stronger and more widespread than ever before.

We have all witnessed the public outrage sparked by the recent brutal gang rape and death of a young woman in India.

The case of high school football players accused of repeatedly raping a 16-year-old girl in the state of Ohio had the New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof asking, *is Steubenville really so different from New Delhi?*

We know that violence against women is happening in every country around the world.

The voices of women, men and young people are echoing throughout the world, saying *enough is enough*. There is a worldwide call to action to end the impunity and protect the rights of women and girls to live free of violence and discrimination.

The world's attention is focused on the pervasive sexual violence and harassment faced by women and girls in public spaces, particularly in urban areas, every single day, just by going about their daily lives.

Violence against women in the private domain is widely recognized as a human rights violation. But sexual violence and harassment against women in public spaces remains largely unaddressed, with few laws or policies in place to address it. It is time for these issues to come front and center as a priority on every policy agenda.

Violence in any form denies women and girls their freedom and their right to be full and equal participants in virtually every aspect of life: from education, to work, to recreation, to public and political life. When women and girls live under fear of violence, there can be no talk of progress towards gender equality, sustainable development, justice, or democracy.

UN Women has recognized that violence against women and girls impacts not only women, but entire families, communities and cities. We have taken the lead to bring this neglected issue to the forefront through the “Safe Cities Free of Violence Against Women and Girls” Global Programme.

We built on the pioneer efforts of local authorities, civil society organizations and women’s networks, and decades of experience with women’s safety initiatives in cities around the world.

With leading women’s organizations, including Women in Cities International, the Huairou Commission, Jagori and Women and Habitat Network in Latin America, we strategically placed gender equality and women’s empowerment and safety of women in public spaces within activities of the UN-Habitat’s Global Network on Safer Cities.

In partnership with UN Habitat, UN Women launched the programmes in 2010 in five pilot cities— Quito, New Delhi, Kigali, Port Moresby, and Cairo.

One year later, UN WOMEN and UN Habitat partnered with UNICEF on the joint programme “Safe and Sustainable Cities,” which is underway in eight cities: Greater Beirut (Lebanon); Dushanbe (Tajikistan); Metro Manila (Philippines); Marrakesh (Morocco); Nairobi (Kenya); Rio de Janeiro (Brazil); San José (Costa Rica) and Tegucigalpa (Honduras).

We are working together with sister UN agencies, women’s networks, civil society organizations, research institutes and the private sector to promote systematic, human rights based, and multi-sectoral and multi-level approaches.

Through the Safe Cities Global Initiative we are documenting cases of sexual harassment and violence against women and girls in public spaces, highlighting the impact and the universality of the issue.

The growing evidence shows that whether New York or Port Moresby, Cairo or London, New Delhi or Steubenville, this form of gender based violence affects women and girls every day and everywhere: on the street, in buses and subways, in markets, and recreational areas, near schools, and in parking lots.

We are hearing first-hand from women and girls through the Safe Cities Global Programme that sexual harassment and fear of violence in public spaces are barriers in their lives. Women and girls are breaking the silence.

Women and girls are experiencing sexual harassment and violence in public spaces without exception: whether from poor, rich or middle-income communities and countries.

With the Safe Cities programme, UN Women is mobilizing partnerships, generating innovation, and advancing progress for women's empowerment and gender equality. We are working as a key partner and catalyst for change in over 20 cities across the world. We have the potential to reach 35 cities in 2013, far ahead of our goal in the UN Women Strategic Plan to reach this number by 2017.

Several results have been achieved:

In Quito, findings from the Safe City programme scoping study and the Cartas de Mujeres Campaign led to the adoption of a pioneering amendment to a city ordinance on sexual violence and harassment in public spaces.

Advocacy for women's safety concerns in the state of Kerala, India contributed to the passage of a new law in 2011 on violence against women.

As a result of Cairo's Safe City Programme, in 2012 Egypt's Ministry of Housing, Utilities and Urban Development adopted women's safety audits into its urban planning, which allow for consultations with local women to identify safe and unsafe areas in their communities.

We have also entered into an exciting partnership with Microsoft to research the use of mobile technology to document and prevent violence, especially sexual harassment and violence in public spaces.

Governments' commitments continue to grow. Cities in developed countries are now expressing interest in participating in the Safe Cities Global Initiative. The city of Dublin has committed to conducting a scoping study, the first step for any

effective, evidence-based safe city initiative. Other cities such as Reykjavik [Rek-ya-vik] (Iceland), Sakai (Japan), and Copenhagen have reached out to UN Women to learn more about the initiative.

UN Women looks forward to working closely in these cities to carry the programme forward.

Despite these important achievements, the issue of violence against women in public spaces remains under-recognized and under-resourced.

With visibility increasing, UN Women and its partner agencies have an opportunity to expand their work in prevention and response and to develop model approaches and tools for use around the world.

We also have a strategic opportunity to reach a breakthrough on sexual violence and harassment and increasing safety in public spaces with the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women, and the discussions underway to shape the post-2015 agenda. The voices of women and girls must be heard in these and all discussions and consultations on future development goals.

Next month, UN Women and its sister agencies will join cities from around the world to exchange knowledge and lessons learned on safe city initiatives and to strengthen partnerships at the World Alliance of Cities against Poverty Forum in Dublin.

The Executive Board has a crucial role to play by continuing and reinforcing its support to UN Women's work to end violence against women in urban spaces.

Dedicated funds are needed immediately. Without new funding, this work is at risk in Quito, Cairo, and Kigali and in the 8 cities of the "Safe and Sustainable Cities" initiative.

We must take advantage of this opportunity to collaborate with partners to create safer, smarter and more sustainable cities and communities where women and girls can live and thrive with equal rights, equal dignity and equal opportunities.

The time to act is now.

Thank you.