

25 November 2002

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against
Women**

Family, to many of us, means a place where we seek warmth, comfort, care and understanding. It is usually associated with the idea of a caring mother uniting the family members. This is not the reality for many women and girls in the world. Instead, it is for many of them, a place where they experience terrible forms of violence and discrimination. Some of them are subjected to the brutality of individual family members, others suffer from violence because cultural practices make violence legitimate, some of them are killed or maimed in the name of protecting the family's honour. Furthermore, these acts often remain hidden within the family, and tolerated by the society and, sometimes worst of all, by the state authorities. Sometimes such acts are not criminalized in domestic law and as a result, the perpetrators of such serious crimes remain unpunished.

Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace and to eradication of poverty. Violence against women leads to trauma of fear, insecurity and impairs their physical and psychological integrity for life. Unfortunately in all societies, to greater or lesser degree, domestic violence is practiced routinely and some women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture. It is acknowledged that "the low social and economic status of women can be both a cause and consequence of violence against women."

The United Nations, NGO advocates, civil society and some private sector corporations have raised awareness of this phenomenon and brought it into the open throughout the world. The United Nations General Assembly passed a Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women (48/104 of 20 December 1993) urging Member States to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and or withdrawing reservations to the Convention. Article four of the The Declaration is very specific and detailed in guiding the Member States on its implementation through local domestic legislation, and affirms that "states should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligation with respect to its elimination".

Member States should pursue active and visible strategies vigorously to sensitize the male population, and in particular the law enforcements officials, the military, local police and security officials and those dealing with human rights and humanitarian situations to accord special protection to women. Appropriate measures should be adopted, especially in the field of education and training to promote mutual respect and cooperation among girls and boys and men and women as a first step to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and

women and to eliminate customary practices and all other practices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either sex and on stereotyped roles for man and woman. Provision of facilities to counsel and assist women who have suffered from violence should be given priority.

I strongly appeal to every State and every individual to show their appreciation to women and respect for their human rights and fundamental freedoms through zero-tolerance to any act of violence against them and by providing adequate assistance and help those who are suffering.