

52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women – February 25, 2008
Secretary-General launch on campaign to end violence against women.

Speech by Taina Bien-Aimé

Equality Now

Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. President of ECOSOC, Distinguished Ministers, Mr. Chairperson of the Commission, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of Equality Now, an international human rights organization working to end violence and discrimination against women and girls around the world and part of the international women's movement, it is an honor to stand here and address this assembly gathered today for the opening of the 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his leadership in this important initiative to end violence against women.

Our work to end violence against women goes hand in hand with our efforts to achieve gender equality. One of the greatest challenges the global community faces in the XXIst century is identifying, understanding and addressing the notion of equality. Those of us working in civil society to obtain gender equality know that we need concrete and serious efforts both at the grassroots and governmental levels to do so. From the most remote village to the most developed metropolis, from national parliaments to international bodies, the fundamental right to equality between men and women has yet to be realized. Inequality leads to discrimination and gender discrimination leads to violence against women and girls of all ages.

Every year, millions of women and girls, perceived to be less than fully human – by virtue of their birth - are beaten, raped, mutilated, burned, sold into prostitution, and murdered, often by their own husbands or other family members.

The 2006 Report of the Secretary General on Violence Against Women duly stated that violence against women is both “universal and particular”; universal because

there is not one country in the world where women do not face violence and discrimination *because* they were born female; and particular, because every community will allow different forms of such violence and discrimination, too often with impunity. Ending impunity for violence against women is the beginning of ending such violence. We need governments and we need the Secretary-General to help end impunity. Those who rape women; those who subject women to unspeakable crimes in the name of family honor, religion, or culture; those who exploit women in the commercial sex trade, not only the traffickers, but all those who create the demand for the commercial sexual exploitation of women; and those who use rape and other forms of sexual violence as a weapon of war in armed conflict, must all be held accountable under the law.

As the Secretary-General has indicated, in the past decades, the international women's movement has gained momentum, locally and globally, as the voices and work of individuals and grassroots organizations working to end violence and discrimination against women and girls are starting to be heard. Men and boys are increasingly joining us in this struggle. Without their full and dedicated participation, we will not reach our goals. We welcome the Secretary-General's commitment to dedicate resources in his power to address ways to end violence and discrimination against women and to ensure gender parity at the highest levels of the United Nations system. We urge member states to implement the pledges they have made through international instruments and the Beijing Platform for Action. We must work together to repeal all laws that discriminate against women – laws that explicitly deprive women of property and inheritance, of equality in family matters, of citizenship and laws that even promote violence against women. Laws are the most formal expression of government policy and failing to repeal sex discriminatory laws denies women equal protection of the law.

The United Nations has acknowledged that women's participation is critical to our collective efforts to end poverty, the scourge of HIV/AIDS, to establish peace and security, to protect the environment, and to secure the economic, social and

intellectual development of nations. But if over half of the world's population is systematically denied equality, and thus made vulnerable to violence, our efforts to secure a safer and better world for our children and grandchildren shall remain weak. We believe in a world where being born female is not sorrow and pain, but joy and hope for a better tomorrow. With the leadership of the United Nations and the political will of its member states, working together with civil society, envisioning a world of equality for men and women, girls and boys shall become reality, thus rendering violence against women and girls unacceptable and extinct.

Thank you.