

**Opening Remarks by Carolyn Hannan
Director, Division for the Advancement of Women**

**Fourth International Helvi Sipilä Seminar
Organized by the Finnish UNIFEM Committee**

United Nations Headquarters, 4 March 2009

Madame Moderator,
Distinguished participants,

I am honoured to make opening remarks at this Fourth International Helvi Sipilä Seminar. I thank the Finnish Federation of University Women/International Federation of University Women and the Finnish UNIFEM Committee for their efforts in organizing this seminar, and for the continued support to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women through this initiative.

Throughout her life in her work in many different contexts, Minister Helvi Sipilä kept a strong focus on the human rights of women and girls, including the right to be free from the fear of violence. From her extensive efforts to promote gender equality and empowerment of women in the United Nations and in many other fora, Minister Sipilä was keenly aware of the vulnerability of women and girls to different forms of violence and the need for concerted efforts, particularly in the areas of policy development and legislation, to eradicate violence against women in all its forms in both the public and private spheres.

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The theme of this seminar – the eradication of violence against women - is critical for the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women. Violence against women remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations of our time. It has far-reaching consequences - endangering the lives of women and girls, harming their families and communities, and damaging the very fabric of societies. Halting the scourge of persistent violence against women is one of the most serious and urgent challenges of our time - critical not only for women and girls themselves but for the future development of humankind. Violence against women and girls undercuts the potential for achieving equality, development and peace and security - the critical goals established over the past 60 years by the international community, and reaffirmed by world leaders here in the United Nations in 2000 and 2005.

There is a growing global momentum to address violence against women and unprecedented action is being taken. A number of critical events in recent years have put the eradication of violence against women firmly on the agenda of the United Nations. In October 2006, the Secretary-General of the United Nations launched his in-depth study on violence against women. The study highlighted the persistence and unacceptability of all forms of violence against women; and identified concrete ways and means to ensure a more sustained and effective response to violence against women, by all stakeholders.

The General Assembly responded to the Study with a comprehensive and action-oriented resolution. It called on all stakeholders to intensify their efforts to eliminate violence against women. It requested the Secretary-General to establish a database, with information

