

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION  
OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
25 November 2015**

The atrocity crimes being committed against women and girls in conflict zones, along with the domestic abuse found in all countries, are grave threats to progress.

I am deeply concerned about the plight of women and girls living in conditions of armed conflict, who suffer various forms of violence, sexual assault, sexual slavery and trafficking. Violent extremists are perverting religious teachings to justify the mass subjugation and abuse of women. These are not random acts of violence, or the incidental fallout of war, but rather systematic efforts to deny women's freedoms and control their bodies. As the world strives to counter and prevent violence extremism, the protection and empowerment of women and girls must be a key consideration.

Roughly half of today's 60 million forcibly displaced people are women. Many who flee war and violence are often exploited by unscrupulous smugglers, and frequently suffer gender discrimination and xenophobia in host societies. Those who are too young, too old or too frail to make the risky journey are left behind even more vulnerable without those who have left.

Even in areas at peace, violence against women persists in the form of femicide, sexual assault, female genital mutilation/cutting, early marriage and cyberviolence. These practices traumatize individuals and tear at the fabric of society.

I have led a global response through the UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign and the HeForShe initiative to engage men in promoting gender equality. I call on governments to increase contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, which aims to address chronic underinvestment in this area.

Millions of people across the world are uniting under the banner colour orange, chosen to symbolize the brighter future of a world free from violence against women and girls. This year, in a sign of the growing momentum for change, orange lights will illuminate iconic landmarks from the historic ruins at Petra in Jordan to Niagara Falls in North America.

We can also blaze a path to a future of dignity and equality for all by implementing the newly adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which

recognizes the importance of eliminating violence against women, with related targets across several of the Sustainable Development Goals. Recent major reviews of United Nations peace operations, peacebuilding efforts and the women, peace and security agenda have all highlighted the critical value of women's participation in peace and security.

The pervasiveness of violence against women and girls means we can all take steps to address it. Let us join forces to end this crime, promote full gender equality and realize a world where women and girls enjoy the safety they deserve – for their sake and for all of humanity.