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TOWARDS SAFER CITIES FOR WOMEN

REPORT ON THE GENDER AND WOMEN ROUNDTABLE OF THE FIFTH WORLD URBAN FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 24 MARCH 2010, 16:30 TO 19:00
RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL



Held on 24 March 2010 as part of the fifth World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the Gender and Women Roundtable “Towards Safer Cities for Women,” was hosted by the Huairou Commission, Women and Cities International and the Women and Habitat Network of Latin America, in partnership with UN-HABITAT. The Roundtable brought together crucial actors in the field of building safer cities for women.

Violence against women in private and public spaces hinders sustainable urban development processes and impedes the ability of women to access opportunities in urban life. These opportunities are related to a citizen’s “right to the city,” one of the recurring themes of the Fifth World Urban Forum. The Roundtable touched on a number of key issues, including women’s role in urban planning, the role of women’s groups in policy development and implementation, and the importance of including men in community-wide violence reduction efforts.

The Roundtable was also a step in the right direction for strengthening collaboration between multiple stakeholders working in partnership to make cities safer for women.

MODERATOR:

Ms. Ana Falu, Director of the Housing and Habitat Research Institute of Architecture, National University of Cordoba, Argentina

PANELLISTS:

Mrs. Anna Tibajuka, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT

Ms. Nilcéa Freire, Minister of the Special Secretariat of Policies for Women, Brazil

Ms. Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, Regional Program Director, Brazil and Southern Cone, United Nations Development Fund for Women, Brazil

Ms. Liliana Raneiro, Director, Argentina Centre for Exchange and Services and Coordinator of Women and Habitat Network Latin America, Argentina

Ms. Arlene Bailey, Fletchers, Founder, Fletchers Land Parenting Association; Member of the Huairou Commission and GROOTS International (Grassroots Women’s Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood), Jamaica

Ms. Caroline Moser, Director, Global Urban Research Centre, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

Ms. Sandra Beatriz Rojas-Sandoval Cupe, City Councillor, Ayacucho, Peru

2. EMERGING ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Successful approaches to improve women’s safety should start with urban planning, and promote approaches that involve women’s participation and role in urban planning, including grassroots involvement.
- There has been a paradigm shift from talking about violence against women to talking about women’s safety. Many see this as a positive shift since it focuses on practical interventions to create safe environments.
- Globalization and urbanization make it important to address violence against women while considering a range of other risk factors for violence, such as racial discrimination, human trafficking, and poor tenure security, evictions and discriminatory land practices against women.
- New global partnerships, such as the UNIFEM-led Global Safe Cities Programme, can be important catalysts for local governments and civil society working together in partnership to

tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence against women in cities.

- Strategic partnerships between women's ministries, gender bureaus of local governments and civil society should be encouraged, since they can develop into powerful networks to ensure safer cities, but it requires a strategic vision, such as a national plan of action, and proper budgeting.
- Although there is greater awareness among local authorities of legal frameworks to promote women's rights and safety, their implementation is often lacking and local governments need to place women's safety in cities as a high priority.
- There is a need to work more closely with men as allies in changing discriminatory attitudes against women, creating more inclusive cities, and stopping gender-based violence.
- There is a need for discussion around gender and women's urban safety to acknowledge regional differences and pursue actions that are relevant to local social, political, cultural, economic and legal contexts.

3. BACKGROUND

It is now widely recognized that violence against women is a violation of women's human rights: women have a right to live their lives free of violence, and fear of violence. Even when these rights exist, they are often not realized or implemented in the lives of real women.

Gender-inclusive cities are cities where women's rights, including the right to safety, are realized in everyday life, and it is the responsibility of cities and local governments to build policies and services that mitigate gender-based violence.

With half the world's people already living in urban areas, and urbanization on the rise in developing countries, the creation of gender responsive and women-inclusive cities is a necessary means to urban sustainability.

As we move towards the two-thirds marker for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, it is ever more apparent that the world is still a long way off from achieving gender equality. Women's contributions to development and violence reduction often go unrecognized and under-resourced.

It is of vital importance to recognize the continuum between violence in public and private spaces and the systemic factors that allow for its continued perpetuation in our cities. It is only by acknowledging these factors that we can begin to address the root causes.

Since 1999, UN-HABITAT's Safer Cities Programme has been working with local authorities and grassroots women's organizations on implementing women's safety audits on urban spaces in Africa. In 2004, the work expanded to Latin America with a multitude of partners.

Established in 1996, the UN Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women is currently the "only multilateral grant-making mechanism that supports local, national and regional efforts to end violence against women and girls."¹

However, there are growing international efforts to bridge divides and to work together towards making cities safer and more inclusive of women. For example, in February 2008, the United Nations Secretary General's Campaign "Unite to End Violence Against Women" was launched at the 52nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. And in

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http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/trust_fund.php

2009, UNIFEM and UN-HABITAT signed a historic agreement in which the two agencies pledged to team up to work towards making cities safer for women.

In the same year, UNIFEM launched their “Global Safe Cities for Women and Girls” programme. These important milestones attest to the fact that the international community has acknowledged the necessity of creating links between actors at all levels, and of taking action around urban violence against women to create meaningful and lasting change in urban environments across the globe.

The challenge is to move from the recognition of the urban divide and the importance of gender-inclusive cities, to the creation and replication of cities where women’s rights are paramount, where women’s safety is important, and where gender equality and women’s contributions to community and city development and safety is the norm.

4. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Ms. Ana Falu, Director of the Housing and Habitat Research Institute of Architecture, National University of Cordoba, Argentina

As the moderator of the Roundtable, Ms. Falu explained that the aim of the Roundtable was to discuss the rights of women to live in their cities without violence, both in their homes and in public spaces. She explained that this includes the right to leisure, to work and to move about, regardless of skin colour or where women live in the city.

She said the globalized world is adding to the complexities of violence against women. For example, such violence can be related to issues such as drug-related crime, and human and organ trafficking. In public spaces, when places are unsafe, fears grow and limit the use of the city. She highlighted the growing momentum of collaboration between groups that are working together to make cities free of violence against women.

Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT

In opening the Round Table, Mrs. Tibaijuka stated that cities that show violent statistics daily, and sometimes hourly, are cities of shame. However, she pointed out that urban planning which involves women is known to work in making cities safer for all residents. She described safe cities as good for business and for health. On the other hand, she noted that fear of urban crime and violence can be as damaging and inhibiting to women as actual violence in public spaces. “Fear is lingering and pervasive,” she said, and it affects the ability of women to participate in public life, to be healthy and to exercise their right to the city.

In 15 years of working with local authorities on improving urban safety, UN-HABITAT has identified that good governance and equitable participation of women in decision making about urban spaces are key elements of success. Mrs. Tibaijuka asked participants of the Roundtable to acknowledge and applaud the men in the room who came to support efforts to make cities safer for women and more gender-inclusive.

Ms. Nilcéa Freire, Minister of the Special Secretariat of Policies for Women, Brazil

Ms. Freire emphasized the importance of empowering women to voice their own ideas on how to make cities safer, and to be part of building frameworks for non-violence, rather than being treated as passive subjects. She described the Women for Peace Programme in Brazil, which gives women in the peripheries of big cities training to be stronger mediators in their own communities.

As a second example, she explained how Brazil promoted and documented women’s dialogues for public safety in seven Brazilian cities before the first national conference on public safety was held in 2009. Following the dialogues, many of the proposals taken forward by women

were absorbed by the National Council for Public Safety, she said.

She described Brazil's National Plan of Action on Policies for Women, which also addresses urbanization and women's safety. In addition, 24 out of 27 states in Brazil have their own gender departments that implement gender policies at the local level, including policies on making cities safer.

She highlighted the importance of thinking about public space and the conditions that make interpersonal relationships achievable, including organized urban space, where disputes in land tenure can be understood and resolved. She emphasized the importance of access to basic services—such as health, sanitation, drinking water and sewage systems—and the importance of safe, inclusive places that can be enjoyed as part of citizenship, and that promote economic opportunities.

Ms. Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, Regional Program Director, Brazil and Southern Cone, United Nations Development Fund for Women, Brazil

Ms. Tavares introduced UNIFEM's Global Safe Cities Programme, a new US \$16 million flagship programme that is meant to be a catalyst for local governments and civil society to tackle sexual harassment and sexual violence against women in cities. The programme advocates a zero tolerance policy on violence. Important collaborators include the police, transport authorities and providers, men and young people. UNIFEM has worked closely with UN-HABITAT and is also increasing collaboration with non-governmental organizations.

She named several examples where the Programme is already reaping promising results, such as the training of municipal guards in Rosario, Argentina. The programme is focused on scaling up methodologies that are proven to work. She also directed participants to a range of tools on ending violence against women promoted through the UNIFEM-

supported website
<http://www.endvawnow.org/>.

Ms. Liliana Raneiro, Director, Argentina Centre for Exchange and Services and Coordinator of Women and Habitat Network Latin America, Argentina

Ms. Raneiro spoke of the importance of project and programme implementation at the local government level. Many governments already have national conventions to protect women's rights and guarantee their safety, but there is a need for greater involvement from local authorities. She stated that government mechanisms to ensure participation of women's groups and civil society in decision-making would make local authorities more accountable. Gender training of policy makers on urban safety could also help.

She highlighted the need for statistics and gender analysis of violence in cities. More specifically, there is a need to understand who the offenders are and who the victims are, bearing in mind that different groups of women may be affected differently. She also emphasized the need to unify data collection systems and the need for local governments to ensure there are indicators for monitoring gender and urban safety.

Ms. Arlene Bailey Fletchers, Founder, Fletchers Land Parenting Association; Member of the Huairou Commission and GROOTS International (Grassroots Women's Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood), Jamaica

Ms. Bailey spoke about her personal experience in founding the Fletchers Land Parenting Association, a community-based organization in an inner city community in Jamaica. The group advocates for community parenting to assist families to lead non-violent lives, particularly families led by single parents.

Fletchers Land Parenting Association operates under the premise that both women and men are needed for balanced parenting. Furthermore, if children are taught to reject violence early in childhood, they are less likely to engage in violence. She emphasized the importance of educating men about their role as fathers and about gender issues, while also encouraging their involvement in promoting gender equality and safety in the community.

Ms. Caroline Moser, Director, Global Urban Research Centre, University of Manchester, United Kingdom

Ms. Moser described a paradigm shift from talking about violence to talking about safety and security. Although the shift has resulted in greater emphasis on positive interventions, some critics believe it can gloss over institutional and structural constraints that continue to be at the heart of gender discrimination in governance.

She spoke of conceptual frameworks in discussing violence against women: economic violence, social violence, political violence and institutional violence. She added that tenure rights and the violence women face during evictions must also be considered. For example, women can be violently attacked in trying to defend land. Furthermore, gender analysis of safety in urban spaces needs to consider the impact of climate change and the role of the private sector. Ms. Moser described

Brazil as “as ahead of the loop,” concerning policies on women’s safety in urban spaces, but she also urged participants to consider what is happening in other places apart from Latin America.

Ms. Sandra Beatriz Rojas-Sandoval Cupe, City Councillor, Ayacucho, Peru

From her position in local government, Ms. Rojas-Sandoval Cupe assessed that while local governments are aware of legal frameworks at the national level to protect women’s safety and their rights, they often do not prioritize the issue or implement policies and laws. She stated that local governments often give preference to infrastructure and health and safety, but addressing violence against women in cities is not considered a priority for governments.

However, she said that the representation of women in politics can help to make government policies and programmes more gender responsive. As the President of the Network of Women Councillors in Ayacucho, she said the network’s agenda had focused on domestic violence and is now increasingly recognizing a need to address violence in public spaces.

4. OPEN-FLOOR DISCUSSIONS

The following points summarize thoughts and ideas expressed by various participants:

- a) Despite legal progress on protecting women from violence, Brazil still faces the challenges of support and housing for women who are trying to escape violence. Training of social workers and police officers is needed, with special attention to addressing the needs of low-income women, who have fewer options for help than wealthier women.
- b) There is a need for distinction between actual and “symbolic” forms of violence and the approaches to address each.

c) There is strong support for greater men's involvement in addressing violence against women. Men can help in changing cultures and attitudes that condone violence, such as the justification for murders of women considered to be unfaithful.

d) Events such as the Gender and Women Roundtable at the World Urban Forum should be encouraged and supported since they are unique opportunities for women's networks and experts on urban safety to meet.

e) Participants emphasized women's rights to control their own bodies. Some raised concerns about the criminalization of women who get abortions and about rape in the military.

f) Macroeconomics should be considered in analyzing factors that impede women's ability to be free of violence. For example, the prevalence of women's non-remunerated work should be examined.

g) Although the Roundtable was widely supported by organizations already working in the area of women's urban safety, there is still much advocacy to be done to convince others in the women's movement of the plight of poor women in cities.

h) Most of the discussions during the Roundtable focused on cities in Latin America and the Caribbean, which are often seen as ahead of those in Africa and Asia in their understanding of women's safety in public spaces. Future Gender and Women Roundtables should have better regional balance.

i) There is a need to address situations where violence against women is exacerbated by gang violence and other crime.

j) Latin America and the Caribbean is commonly discussed as one region, but gender and urban safety issues in the Caribbean context often merits separate consideration.

k) In helping women to escape violence, efforts should be made to consider removing abusive men from homes, rather than only focusing on moving abused women.

l) More resources should be allocated for implementing safety programmes for women in urban spaces.

4. CONCLUSION

The Gender and Women Roundtable at the Fifth World Urban Forum stimulated thought-provoking discussion on approaches to improving urban safety for women, and ultimately for all inhabitants of towns and cities.

Participants highlighted a need to discuss women's safety in broad contexts, linking the topic to issues such as poverty, institutional racism and access to basic urban services.

There was general acknowledgement that different women have different experiences in the city and different needs regarding safety, which can, for example, be linked to their race or sexuality.

This makes it necessary for governments and policy makers to adopt strategies and approaches that cater to a variety of needs and priorities.

Lastly, instead of adopting a single focus on violence and the potentially negative effects of urban life on women's safety, the Roundtable promoted a balanced outlook that also highlighted the positive potential of cities to be places of safety, security and well-being for women and for societies in general.