Speech at the lighting of the India Gate, in commemoration of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Keynote address by Lakshmi Puri, UN Assistant Secretary-General, and UN Women Deputy Executive Director, India Gate, New Delhi, 25 November 2015.

Your Excellency, Ms. Sumitra Mahajan, Honourable Speaker of the Lok Sabha;
Ms. Aishwaryaa R. Dhanush, Film Director, Classical Dancer and Singer;
Mr. Yuri Afanasiev, UN Resident Coordinator of India;
Ms. Rebecca Tavares, UN Women Representative in India;
Representatives from the government, civil society, UN agencies and the students present here!

We await the arrival of Her Excellency, Ms. Sumitra Mahajan, Honourable Speaker of the Lok Sabha to join us in this historic... or may I say, ‘Herstoric’ moment that is very soon going to unfold before us.

The symbolism of the moment and the monument is not lost on us...although India Gate is a war memorial dedicated to the soldiers we lost in first world war, it has over the years become the rallying point for many an issue and many a struggle...

Today we are commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. 25 November and the 25th of every month are marked as Orange Days! As a bright and optimistic colour, orange represents a future free from violence against women and girls ...it is the colour of hope, of change and optimism.

In India the colour has a special significance...orange, बसंती signifies the colour of freedom too. आप सभी ने स्वतंत्रता संग्राम के दौर का ‘मेरा रंग दे बसंती चोला’ तो सुना ही रोका.

Today the lighting up of India Gate in the colour Basanti, or orange, signifies freedom from violence for all women and girls in India and across the world.

Today more than 125 countries have outlawed violence against women, and the constitutions of more than 139 countries guarantee women’s rights.

As you may know, on 25 September this year more than 150 world leaders adopted the new 2030 ‘Agenda for Sustainable Development’. For the first time in the history of humankind, we have a global development goal, goal number 5 on gender equality and women’s empowerment, as well as reinforcing targets threaded throughout all the other 16 goals.

It is also the first time that violence against women has been recognized as a sustainable development issue.

This is ground breaking and momentous! It also means we need to change how we understand violence. जब हम हिस्सा की बात कर रहे हैं तो यह केवल physical violence तक सीमित नहीं है...और ना ही यह सिर्फ एक law and order की समस्या है.

It is inextricably linked to women’s status in India and also globally. It is both a cause and consequence of their low status.

Women’s experiences of violence lead to their low status and in turn their low status makes them vulnerable to violence.
It denies them their basic rights:
the right to live without fear
the right to mobility
to go school
to make a living, to earn,
to just enjoy leisure... to loiter...to just be...to their bodily integrity!

A staggering one in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime—a pandemic of global proportions. Unlike an illness, however, perpetrators and even entire societies choose to commit violence—and can choose to stop.

'Orange your world' is our call today and this year PREVENTION of violence is the focus! Stopping the violence from happening in the first place is the key and this has to be in all spaces: private, public and all work spaces, both organized and unorganized.

Violence is not inevitable. It can be prevented.

And as such, prevention strategies should be holistic, with multiple interventions undertaken in parallel in order to have long-lasting and permanent effects. Many sectors, actors and stakeholders need to be engaged.

But it’s not as straightforward as eradicating a virus. There is no vaccine, medication or cure. And there is no one single reason for why it happens.

More evidence is emerging on what interventions work to prevent violence—from community mobilization to change social norms, to school interventions targeting staff and pupils, to economic empowerment and income supplements coupled with gender equality training.

जब हम कहते हैं ‘no to violence’ तो इसका क्या मतलब है?

It means we
say NO to honour killings
to dowry
to child marriage
to rape and abuse of children
to abuse with in our own homes
to marital rape
We say no to stalking
to acid attacks
to trafficking of women and girls
to sexual harassment at the workplace
to everyday normalized forms of violence
We also SAY NO to impunity!

And this means an effective coordinated multi-sectoral response system. Different sectors in society must work together: education, health, law and order, both police and the judiciary, transport and sectors like urban development and planning that to some on first glance may not seem to have any bearing on women’s safety and security.

Ending violence against women and their empowerment also means investment: mahilaao ke sashaktikaran ke liye yeh bhi jarru hai ki parikshanaon me pratyay pratyay hote hain. samajik aur aarhik yojnaaon me mahilaao ke liye prarthana karte hain, unki tahayarii me mahilaao ka yogdan hain, aur yeh amal me laane ke liye aavashyak dhan rashii bhi uprabhdo hain.

India has already taken steps in this direction by endorsing and advocating for the standalone goal on gender equality and by implementing flagship government schemes like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao.
Today, I call upon all of you, particularly the young people out there, to take action. 
आइए हम सब मिल कर ये शपथ से कि हर महिला हर लड़की का जीवन हिंसा मुक्त हो! 

Let us come together to make a different choice! 

Together, we can achieve a more equal world—a Planet 50-50—where women and girls can and will live free from violence.