

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...

इंडिया गेट प्रतीक है साहस और संकल्प का, और निर्भयता का. आज यह स्मारक और इसकी ज्योति हमें प्रेरित करते हैं कि हम इस अभियान को और मज़बूत करें, ताकि औरतों और लड़कियों का जीवन हिंसा से मुक्त हो.

निर्भया भी साहस का प्रतीक थी. उसके संघर्ष की याद में हजारों लोग यहाँ इकट्ठा हुए थे, यह माँग करने कि उसे न्याय मिले, क़ानूनों का अमल हो, और ऐसे अपराध फिर न हो.

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 होगा.

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 हिंसा की बात कर रहे हैं तो यह केवल physical violence तक सीमित नहीं है...और ना ही यह सिर्फ़ 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.

तो इसे कैसे किया जाए ? जवाब सरल है. हमें उन सारी प्रथाओं को खतम करना होगा जो हिंसा के कारण हैं, या जिनसे हिंसा को बढ़ावा या प्रोत्साहन मिले... लड़कियों को जन्म ही नहीं लेने देना, उन्हें कम पोषण देना, उन्हें शिक्षा न दिलाना, बालिग होने से पहले शादी करना - अगर हम इन सब पर रोक लगा सकें तो हम हिंसा को भी रोक सकेंगे. मतलब की हमें ढाँचा बदलना होगा...

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!

और इसमें सबकी भागीदारी आवश्यक है. सरकार, गैर सरकारी संस्थाओं, शिक्षकों, पुलिस, हमारी न्याय व्यवस्था, मीडिया, और हम और आप जैसे साधारण लोग - हम सब इस मुहिम में योगदान कर सकते हैं.

इसमें पुरुषों और लड़कों का योगदान भी बेहद ज़रूरी है. यूएन विमेन के HeForShe अभियान का यही ध्येय है. अब समय आ गया है की पुरुष और लड़के भी समझें की यह केवल महिलाओं ओर लड़कियों की लड़ाई नहीं है. और ना ही ये केवल महिलाओं का मुद्दा है... ये हम सब का मुद्दा है...ये विकास का मुद्दा है!

HeForShe का संदेश यही है कि पुरुष भी शामिल हों दुनिया को और समान बनाने के प्रयत्न में. जब दुनिया की आधी आबादी शिक्षा, पोषण, स्वास्थ्य और अन्य चीज़ों से वंचित रहें, तो हम कैसे विकास की ओर बढ़ पाएँगे? यहाँ सारे पुरुषों ओर लड़कों से मेरा अनुरोध है – HeForShe अभियान को अपनायें, और अपनी आवाज़ को जोड़ें उन हज़ारों, लाखों महिलाओं की आवाज़ के साथ, और यह संदेश भेजें कि महिलाओं को हिंसा के बिना जीने का अधिकार है.

We also need to understand that violence against women has tremendous costs. Costs to communities, nations and societies—for public well-being, health and safety, and for school achievement, productivity and peace and security.

The effects of violence can remain with women and children for a lifetime, and can pass from one generation to another. Studies show that children who have witnessed, or been subjected to violence are more likely to become victims or abusers themselves.

But more importantly **violence against women is a violation of their human rights.**

The right of women to live free of violence depends on the protection of their human rights and a strong chain of justice.

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.

A rape survivor must have rapid access to a health clinic that can administer emergency medical care, a woman facing domestic violence must have someplace to go without or with her children to enjoy safety, sanity and shelter. A survivor of violence must have confidence that when she files a police report, she will receive justice and the perpetrator will be punished. And an adolescent boy in school who learns about health and sexuality must be taught that coercion, violence and discrimination against girls are unacceptable.

Ending violence against women and their empowerment also means investment: महिलाओं के सशक्तिकरण के लिए यह भी ज़रूरी है कि परियोजनाओं में पर्याप्त निवेश हो. सामाजिक और आर्थिक योजनाओं में महिलाओं के लिए प्रावधान हों, उनकी तैयारी में महिलाओं का योगदान हो, और इनको अमल में लाने के लिए आवश्यक धन राशि भी उपलब्ध हो.

इस में प्राइवेट सेक्टर की भूमिका भी अहम है. हम यह समझ लें की बिज़नेस में महिलाओं का योगदान लाभदायक है. कई रिपोर्ट यह बताते हैं की कंपनियों का मुनाफ़ा महिलाओं के शामिल होने से बहुत ज़्यादा बढ़ा है.

All this is not easy but it is not impossible either.

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 लें 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.