

## **UN and partners open new front in war on sexual violence against girls**



Women marching against sexual violence in the DRC (file photo)

25 September 2009 – The United Nations joined with other partners today to launch a new initiative in the fight against sexual violence against girls, a scourge which affects 150 million victims in a given year and contributes to the spread of HIV and AIDS.

The programme seeks to provide funding to expand surveillance of sexual violence against girls in developing and emerging countries, develop a technical package of interventions for implementation at a country level to reduce the incidence of such abuse, and launch a major media campaign to motivate social and behavioural change.

"These three intervention strategies are pillars of what is expected to emerge as a global movement to address this devastating human injustice and public health problem," the partners said in a joint news release.

The initiative brings together five UN agencies – the UN Children's Fund (**UNICEF**), the UN Development Fund for Women (**UNIFEM**), the UN Population Fund (**UNFPA**), the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (**UNAIDS**) and the World Health Organization (**WHO**) – with the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and private sector supporters via the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI).

"Sexual violence against girls increases their vulnerability to HIV infection and must be stopped," UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé said. "AIDS responses must include initiatives to stop sexual violence as an integral part of HIV prevention and treatment programmes."

Research demonstrates that such violence is a direct and an indirect driver of the HIV and AIDS epidemics, with the risk of infection increasing following forced sex, especially among children.

Gender inequity and partner violence are associated with a substantial part of new HIV infections in Africa, and girls who have experienced sexual coercion are less likely to use condoms and more likely to experience sexually transmitted diseases.

"Sexual violence is a major priority that must be tackled by all, through many interventions," UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid said. "We hope our partnership in this initiative will help reduce such violence through the concrete actions that it proposes."

UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman called the scourge "a moral and ethical outrage and an assault on the world's conscience... Sexual abuse can lead to lost childhoods,

abandoned education, physical and emotional problems, the spread of HIV, and an often irrevocable loss of dignity and self-esteem,” she said.

According to WHO, in 2002 some 150 million girls experienced some form of sexual violence with physical contact.

**News Tracker: past stories on this issue**

UN-backed report outlines social, political factors driving AIDS pandemic