

Keynote speech 26 October 2010:
Presented by the Norwegian Minister of Justice, Mr. Knut Storberget

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning to all of you!

I am honoured to be here today and I have really been looking forward to attend this important conference!

First of all I would like to express my gratitude to the organizers of this conference FORUT, CARE and Reform – we are gathered here today due to your hard work. Thank you very much all of you – your efforts have been crucial !

Ladies and gentlemen

This conference is important first of all because it is urgent to highlight men's responsibility to actively engage in the elimination of all forms of violence against women. Secondly because we need to discuss and learn more about how men can contribute and challenge prevailing gender stereotypes and discriminatory cultural norms in order to prevent such violence.

The idea to arrange a conference like this was born when I visited Malawi last year and learnt how African men have been working on this issue. I was really impressed by the achievements reached by organizations like Sonke Gender Justice and I understood that we had a lot to learn in Norway.

We are gathered here today, because we agree that violence against women is an extensive problem and, without exception, must be dealt with as severe crime.

Despite many positive and significant achievements in policies and practices, violence against woman in various forms remains widespread at all levels of society, in all countries in the world.

We know that one of three women world-wide are exposed to violence during their life time, and one of four women experience domestic violence. According to World Bank data, women aged 15 – 44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, motor accidents, war and malaria.

We also know that women and children are the major victims during and after armed conflicts. Between 250.000 and 500.000 were raped during the 1994 genocide i Rwanda, between 20.000 and 50.000 women were raped during the conflict in Bosnia in the early 1990s.

Last Sunday 1700 hundred women were marching to raise their voices against “sexual terrorism” in Congo – according to UN approximately 15.000 women were raped in Congo last year.

These numbers constitutes the framework and shows us how violence against women and children affects us all.

This is not a women’s issue. It is a human issue.

It is also a global issue.

Least but not last – this is an issue which must be dealt with by men as men form the vast majority of perpetrators of violence!

Violence against women appears in many forms and women are being beaten, trafficked, raped and killed across the world – both in rich and in poor countries.

As minister of justice I have been particularly concerned with domestic violence.

The violence that is taking place at home is often very brutal – in many cases more brutal than the violence taking place in the streets. The victims are living in a situation of constant fear and terror, and the consequences in terms of reduced health and quality of life are profound. The violence that happens in the street makes headlines, the everyday life of domestic violence rarely does. It only reaches the media when the violence ends in loss of life. Even then it is often described as a “family tragedy”, not as the brutal and severe crime it actually is.

The numbers are speaking for themselves; According to the World Health Organization (WHO) 40 to 70 % of the female murder victims in Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and the United States, are killed by their partner or former partner. In Norway the “partner homicides” constitutes between 20 and 30 % of murders committed every year.

In addition; at this very moment – just as I speak – thousands of children live in fear in their home because their father is violent towards their mother. In their home where they should be safe, they feel frightened and insecure.

We are gathered here today, because we are impatient. We recognize the need to move forward. And because we believe that a coordinated action can bring us a step in the right direction to eliminate violence against women.

The Norwegian position is clear; no religion, culture or tradition can ever serve as excuse for violence against women. Further, violence against women is not a private matter but should be dealt with by Governments.

Violence against women must be prevented, combated and alleviated through measures to help and protect the victims, through treatment and prosecution of the perpetrators

and last but not least - through inclusion of men as part of the solution to end violence against women.

Over the last 10 years the Norwegian government has taken some important steps to improve the situation of women and children affected by violence in different forms. We have ensured that the police give these cases a higher priority. We have developed measures to protect the victims in more efficient ways. We have used law enforcement measures and penal codes to underline the seriousness of such violence, and we have tried to learn from other countries experiences, as well as sharing our own.

Nevertheless, we are not content and the challenges are still numerous.

Now, it is time to move forward. And I believe we need new ideas to do that;

We have to acknowledge that law enforcement measures – while important – do not in themselves offer an adequate solution to many victims. I believe we need to develop an additional approach – a broad perspective on justice – supplements to criminalization – strategies to empower the victims, making it possible for them to rebuild and reclaim control over their lives.

We have to shift the burden and rethink our protective measures; many of the protective measures have been framed in ways which forces the victim to take the consequences of the violence. In my opinion it is a paradox that the person threatened – the victim – is the one who normally carries the heaviest load. Why is it worse for the perpetrator to be “locked out” from certain areas, than for the victim to be “locked in”? Our further efforts should be directed at measures which shift the burden from the victim to the offender.

I also believe we have a lot to gain by offering treatment to the perpetrators, in addition to - or as an alternative to - imprisonment. In Norway, we are currently building up a nation-wide system of treatment to perpetrators of violence. Changing patterns of behavior is a key to end such violence.

And last but not least we must motivate and encourage mobilization and action by men to contribute to preventing violence against women.

Men and women must stand shoulder by shoulder in this battle. Men are indispensable partners in eradicating violence against women – they are both part of the problem and part of the solution.

In November last year I was asked to participate in the UN Secretary Generals network of male leaders to combat violence against women. The network is part of the United Nations campaign “UNite to end Violence against Women”, launched by the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, in February 2008.

The campaign seeks to increase global advocacy on violence against women and girls. It also seeks to strengthen partnerships for concrete action at regional and national level, and increase the leadership role of the United Nations.

Of course I accepted the invitation from the Secretary General – and as a member of the network, I have committed myself to contribute to a change in attitudes and mobilization of men in the prevention of violence by;

- Actively advocate for zero tolerance of violence against women of all ages, and work to enhance the visibility of the Secretary General’s campaign to end violence against women,
- Participate in high-profile events and initiatives of the Secretary-General’s Campaign, including key meetings and activities and media interviews,
- Promote publicly, through the media, and other avenues as appropriate, a positive role model of men preventing violence against women,
- Advocate, on behalf of the Secretary-General, by liaising with national and local authorities and other key sectors of the society and economy to ensure support for concrete actions and policy reform to prevent and address violence against women and girls,
- Spearhead innovate efforts at the national and community levels to publicize the campaign and promote the value of a society that is devoid of violence against women,
- Establish partnerships with existing national and community level men’s networks and experts working to combat violence against women, and promote and support their establishment where they may not yet exist,
- Support and represent women’s and men’s organizations and networks and, through leadership and by example, support their efforts to end violence against women

The Network of Men Leaders is a way to strengthen a collective effort to fight violence against women among men. In a unique way, men can mobilize public opinion to ensure that policymakers, at the highest level, work to protect and empower women.

My sincere hope is that we through this initiative mobilize men world-wide to recognize their responsibility for contributing to change.

We have a lot to learn from each other, and international cooperation is in my opinion the way to go.

- This is why I visited Malawi in April last year, benefiting from the experiences of African men on how to mobilize men.
- This is why violence against women was the item of the Council of Europe's Conference of Ministers of Justice, which I hosted in Norway in June 2009.
- This is why we are gathered here today – sharing experiences and best practices with experts from the Southern Africa, India, United States and other countries

But I have also committed myself to act nationally;

- This is why I am launching a new plan of action to combat domestic violence in 2011.
- This is why I am conducting a nationwide survey on violence against women starting in the end of October.
- This is why I have taken the initiative to conduct survey of a selection of spousal homicide cases. Where the object is to strengthen the knowledge base regarding risk factors and possible warning signs. This survey will help develop better and more focused protective measures and better prevention strategies.
- This is why the government has created a nationwide network of Children's Houses – built on the Icelandic model. Here, children who have been subject to sexual abuse or violence, or who have witnessed violence or abuse in intimate relationships, are offered help, care and treatment. This includes new methods of interviewing and medical examination.

In our endeavor to put an end to the violence it is of uttermost importance that we join forces and efforts and cooperate both across the lines that divide different policy sectors and across borderlines.

We must be united against violence against women.

Only together, will we make each other better.

Thank you !