



Milestones

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Landmark Agreement : Prevent and Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls

The 57th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) that met from 4 to 15 March 2013 adopted an agreement to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls. The outcome document included strong agreements to promote gender equality, women's empowerment, and ensure women's reproductive rights and access to sexual and reproductive health services—an area of particular contention. It reaffirmed previous international agreements on women's rights, such as those made in Cairo in 1994.

Welcoming the CSW agreement, the organization UN Women stated: "Violence against women is a universal problem that requires, and has now received, a universal response. Violence occurs in multiple forms in all countries and settings; it harms women and their families and communities, impedes development, and costs countries billions of dollars annually in healthcare costs and lost productivity."

The CSW document condemns the pervasive violence against women and girls, and calls for

increased attention and accelerated action for prevention and response. There is an important focus on prevention and on addressing gender inequalities in the political, economic and social spheres. The document calls for multi-sectoral services for survivors of violence, including health, psychological and social support. It draws attention to the need for services to protect the right to sexual and reproductive health. Punishment of perpetrators is also highlighted as a critical measure to end impunity, as is the need to improve the evidence base and availability of data to inform an effective response.

Civil society groups across the world had lobbied hard to counter attempts by religious orthodoxies to block the declaration, asserting that "customs, tradition or religious considerations must not be tolerated to justify discrimination and violence against women and girls"

The agreement is one more step for realizing the rights and dignity of women and girls. ❏