

Center for Women's Global Leadership



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Item: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women

Statement by Charlotte Bunch, Executive Director – 20 March, 2007

The Center for Women's Global Leadership congratulates the Special Rapporteur on an important report that outlines the challenges of addressing the interface of culture and violence against women. In particular, we welcome her delineation of the ways in which all cultures – North and South, East and West, contemporary as well as traditional – contain factors that reinforce violence against women. The work of achieving human rights for all has always involved making changes in all of our cultures where they conflict with equality and non-discrimination, and working to end VAW is no exception.

In this regard, this report develops further a theme presented by the UN Secretary General's In Depth Study on Violence Against Women in 2006 which noted that "culture as a causal factor for violence against women must be investigated within diverse cultural settings." It is time to stop talking about isolated "cultural forms of violence against women" and instead to focus on how all forms of violence against women are often condoned or supported by cultural attitudes everywhere.

In this regard, we are pleased that she notes the "gun culture" in the US as a cultural manifestation that is lethal for many victims of domestic violence. This is an important example of the often overlooked linkages between violence against women and other manifestations of cultural violence in the North, such as racism and militarism.

Yet, even as the international community has made important progress over the past decade in recognizing sexual violence in war, nevertheless, we note with alarm the lack of decisive action and failure to protect women currently assaulted by just such violence in Darfur, and call on the Human Rights Council to demand swift UN action there.

A key element in this report is the role of culture and violence in reinforcing men's control over women's sexuality, which as the rapporteur has noted here and in past reports, fuels the deadly toll of HIV/AIDS for women and girls. In that regard, CWGL has joined a number of other organizations in launching the international "Women Won't Wait: End HIV and Violence Against Women. Now." campaign and we are calling for a dramatic increase in the resources & attention committed to addressing the intersection of HIV and VAW.

Another aspect of the use of cultural arguments and violence to control women is the often abusive responses to women's human rights defenders who seek to change those

aspects of their cultures that are oppressive to women. This is especially true in terms of women who challenge norms of femininity and who are persecuted because they are or are perceived to be lesbians. I would like to ask the Special Rapporteur if she could tell us more about this form of violence against women activists and what the Council might do to close this protection gap better?

Finally, the Secretary General's study on VAW calls on the Human Rights Council to "discuss, by 2008, the question of violence against women...in relation to their mandates, and to set priorities for addressing this issue in their future efforts and work programmes....as well as to identify and address gapspertaining to VAW." This clearly requires a firm commitment by the Council to gender integration in all of its work. Each and every issue the Council addresses affects women in particular ways -- whether in relation to "human security", attacks on rights defenders, or in terms of discrimination and education.

I would like to ask Ms. Erturk for suggestions on how this recommendation and gender integration can best be addressed by the Council as it shapes its agenda and programme of work?

For many years, the work of the Special Rapporteurs on Violence Against Women has been of great importance in seeking to meet global commitments to the human rights of women. Women around the world urge the Council to renew and support this mandate.