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**Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its
causes and consequences**

53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women

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Mr. Chairperson, distinguished delegates, representatives of the United Nations and the NGO community.

It is a great honour for me to address the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at its 53rd session. In 2008, for the first time since the creation of the position of Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences, the Human Rights Council (HRC) mandated me by its Resolution 7/24 to make an annual oral presentation to the CSW. This is an acknowledgement of the intimate link between the overall efforts for the advancement of women and those for the elimination of violence against them. The opportunity for direct dialogue and engagement between the CSW and the violence against women mandate of the HRC is an important step towards the formation of a more comprehensive strategy for the UN gender agenda.

Mr. Chairperson,

As you know, these are my last months as Special Rapporteur, after six years of extraordinary endeavours which took me to some 18 countries and afforded me the privilege of meeting many remarkable women of great courage and resilience, both women's rights defenders and survivors of violence. I will be submitting my final mission reports to the 11th session of the HRC in June 2009 on my visits to Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Moldova, as well as my last country visit which will be to Kyrgyzstan in April this year.

As a Rapporteur, I also prepare annual thematic reports that address key issues with respect to women's rights and violence against women (VAW). Since 2005, I have addressed the following themes: the intersections between HIV-AIDS and VAW; the due diligence obligation for the elimination of VAW; cultural discourses with respect to VAW; and indicators on VAW and State responses to it.

My last thematic report will focus on the political economy of women's rights and its implications for violence against women. The report analyses how global processes such as neoliberal policies, armed conflict, natural disasters and other crises have created new risks and contradictions for gender relations, or have hindered efforts to eliminate violence against women. It further discusses the current limitations of human rights discourse and practice in responding to the socioeconomic conditions that produce and sustain gender-based violence. In this respect, the report makes a strong appeal for the adoption of an integrated perspective that combines the obligations set out in the Twin Covenants on civil and political rights and on economic and social rights.

I believe this report will prove particularly relevant in the current economic and financial crisis that is affecting people worldwide. The scale and impact of the current crisis is still largely unknown, but it is expected that women and girls in both developed and developing countries will be particularly affected by job cuts, losses of livelihoods, and increased responsibilities in all spheres of their life. A systematic gender analysis of the current economic crisis is critical for developing viable solutions and upholding human rights standards.

Mr. Chairperson,

In my role as the Special Rapporteur, I have found the Human Rights Council communication procedure to be one of the most powerful mechanisms through which women's rights violations across the globe can be brought to the attention of governments for redress. This complaint mechanism does not require ratification of any convention nor does it require the exhaustion of domestic remedies before a complaint can be submitted. When member states created these mechanisms, they equipped them with the flexibility needed to intervene with urgency. I am aware of several cases that I acted on where positive results have been achieved.

However, the effectiveness of this mechanism is undermined by the fact that it is not known and sufficiently used by women's rights defenders. For instance, in 2008, I sent only 86 communications to some 29 governments – often jointly with other mandate holders. Although this represents an increase from the 59 communications sent the previous year, compared to the more conventional mandates such as freedom of expression or torture, it still lags behind.

In addition to my mandated activities, I have attended regional consultations on violence against women with civil society organizations. These consultations have provided me an opportunity to keep abreast of both regional and domestic trends and to be in direct contact with women activists, academics and victims in different regions of the world. They have been an important method of exchange and dialogue which, I believe has served women activists as much as it has the mandate.

Mr. Chairperson

On this occasion, I feel especially fortunate and pleased to be able to present to you a study which provides a comprehensive review of the 15 years of activity of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences (1994-2009).

A joint initiative with UNFPA, this critical review aims to take stock of the achievements of the 15 years of work of the mandate, including the conceptual and paradigm shifts that took place since its inception, the lessons learned and the many challenges still ahead in combating violence against women.

The review reaffirms that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women is a significant forum which can make visible hidden violations, provide support, serve as a vehicle for the voices of the most vulnerable women, and act as an additional channel to access justice and accountability.

I hope you will find this a useful reference document and that it will assist you as you continue working for the promotion and protection of women's rights. This study will also be attached as an Addendum to my annual report to the 11th session of the Human Rights Council scheduled for June 2009.

Mr. Chairperson

In closing, I would like to affirm my deep conviction that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women is indeed an invaluable instrument - more so than any other I have known. It can contribute positively to the betterment of women's lives everywhere and to the efforts of States to fulfill their human rights obligations. The common challenge we face today is to effectively exploit the potential of this mechanism to ensure that women globally enjoy their rights. In this respect, I sincerely hope that this mandate can be complemented with adequate and sustainable resources to ensure proper follow-up and implementation of the recommendations made following official country visits.

I am fully confident that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, in close collaboration with the CSW, will continue to play a major role in effectively combating violence against women and achieving gender equality.

I feel particularly privileged for having been entrusted with the incredible responsibility of promoting and monitoring the rights of women worldwide for the past six years.

Thank you all for your support and encouragement.