

# Justice still out of reach for millions of women

## *UN Women, Press release*

Flagship report from the UN's new organization for women recognizes progress, but calls on governments to take urgent action to end the injustices that keep women poorer and less powerful than men in every country in the world.

**(United Nations, New York, 6 July 2011)**

Justice remains out of reach for millions of the world's women, a flagship report launched today by UN Women warns.

### *Progress of the World's Women: In Pursuit of Justice*

is UN Women's first major report, following the organization's launch in early 2011. It recognizes the positive progress made—139 countries and territories now guarantee gender equality in their constitutions, for example—but also shows that too often, women continue to experience injustice, violence and inequality in their home and working lives.

To ensure justice becomes a reality for all women, UN Women calls on governments to:

Repeal laws that discriminate against women, and ensure that legislation protects women from violence and inequality in the home and the workplace.

Support innovative justice services, including one-stop shops, legal aid and specialized courts, to ensure women can access the justice to which they are entitled.

Put women on the frontline of justice delivery. As police, judges, legislators and activists, women in every region are making a difference and bringing about change.

Invest in justice systems that can respond to women's needs. Donors spend USD 4.2 billion annually on aid for justice reform, but only five percent of this spending specifically targets women and girls.

“With half the world's population at stake, the findings of this report are a powerful call to action. The foundations for justice for women have been laid: In 1911, just two countries in the world allowed women to vote—now that right is virtually universal. But full equality demands that women become men's true equals in the eyes of the law—in their home and working lives, and in the public sphere,” said Michelle Bachelet, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women.

## **Women still suffer gender injustice in their homes, the workplace and public life, Progress finds**

Much has been achieved in the private and public spheres in the last century. Yet discrimination and gender injustice remain prevalent around the world. This inequality can be seen:

In the home:

Domestic violence is now outlawed in 125 countries but, globally, 603 million women live in countries where domestic violence is not considered a crime.

By 2011, at least 52 countries had made marital rape a criminal offence. And yet, more than 2.6 billion women live in countries where it has not been explicitly criminalized.

Laws based on custom or religion, which exist alongside state legislation, frequently restrict women's rights within the family, in marriage, divorce and the right to inherit property.

In the workplace:

117 countries have equal pay laws, yet, in practice, women are still paid up to 30 percent less than men in some countries. And women still do more unpaid domestic and caring work than men in every region of the world.

Globally, 53 percent of working women—600 million in total—are in vulnerable jobs, such as self-employment, domestic work or unpaid work for family businesses, which often lack the protection of labour laws.

In politics and public life:

In countries where there have been steep increases in women's representation in parliaments, for example Rwanda, Nepal and Spain, progressive laws on women's rights have often followed. Yet there are still less than 30 percent of women in parliament in the vast majority of countries.

Changes in the law, when properly enforced, lay the groundwork for changing attitudes and improving women's position in society, Progress highlights

Progress has been made, the report shows, thanks to the efforts of individuals, civil society and governments, to give women more economic and political power through legal change, including guaranteeing equal pay, introducing parliamentary quotas, and ensuring women know their rights and are able to claim them. Landmark cases that have sped reform of laws and changed attitudes include:

The case of Maria da Penha in Brazil, whose husband's attacks, including an attempt to electrocute her, left her paralysed. She took the case to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, resulting in stronger legislation in Brazil on domestic violence, symbolically named Maria da Penha's Law.

The case of Unity Dow, a judge from Botswana, who demanded that she be able to pass on citizenship to her children, whose father was a foreigner. Unity won her case, and at least 19 African countries have since reformed their laws to allow women to pass on citizenship to their children.

But legal reform is only a start, Progress argues—laws must be implemented to translate into true equality

Across the board, existing laws are too often inadequately enforced, the report finds. Many women shrink away from reporting crimes due to social stigma and weak justice systems. The costs and practical difficulties of seeking justice can be prohibitive—from travel to a distant court, to paying for expensive legal advice. The result is high drop-out rates in cases where women seek redress, especially on gender-based violence.

Many governments are now taking practical steps to make justice more accessible for ordinary women—and others should learn from their example, Progress argues

**Ways of opening up access to justice can include:**

Investing in one-stop shops, which bring together justice, legal and health care services in one place and cut down the number of steps a woman has to take to access justice, as in South Africa.

Employing more women police as in Latin America, where women's police stations have led to an increase in the reporting of gender-based violence.

Providing legal aid and awareness for women as in countries as diverse as Pakistan, Mexico, Fiji and Kyrgyzstan, to ensure that women know their rights and can navigate justice systems.

Creating specialized courts such as mobile courts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which are bringing justice to women in remote rural areas where levels of sexual violence are very high.

By changing laws and giving women practical support to see justice done, we can change society and ensure women and men enjoy real equality in the future, Progress concludes.

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their rights worldwide. For more information, visit [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org).