

## FOREWORD

The human, social and economic cost of gender-based violence is incalculable. Transcending boundaries of nationality, culture, religion and socioeconomic status, violence against women and girls in its different manifestations plagues every society through harmful consequences to women's physical and emotional health, loss of self-esteem, and as a leading cause of death of women through murder and suicide. Affecting the capacity of over half the world's population to freely and fully participate in the development process, violence against women and girls carries exorbitant social and economic costs that have yet to be fully and accurately assessed.

The issue of violence against women has brought some of the century's greatest challenges, but also some of the most powerful victories for human rights that have served to place violence against women onto the international agenda as a human rights and a development concern of the highest priority. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) supports innovative initiatives worldwide to combat all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment in the school and in the workplace, rape and sexual slavery in the context of war, trafficking in women across borders, as well as violence associated with traditional practices.

I commend the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) for their initiative to publish the book *Rape: Weapon of Terror*. This book promises to serve as a tool for advancing the goal

of eliminating violence against women, especially in the context of situations of war and civil conflict. The use of gender-based violence, including rape and forced pregnancy, is increasingly a horrifying feature of war in ethnic conflicts. As more and more women and girls are abducted by warring groups, displaced from their homes and communities, and threatened with deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS, they are at the same time called upon to assume wider responsibility for holding their communities together, taking new leadership roles and often sustaining their families single-handedly. All of these experiences have brought home to many women the vivid links between violence, poverty and inequality. They see clearly the continuum of conflict that stretches from the beating at home to the rape on the street to the killing on the battlefield.

This new book serves to broaden our knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence as a weapon of war. At the same time it also highlights the need for effective intervention in the area of peace building and conflict resolution. There is a need to find common ground between civil societies and states, the United Nations system and business communities so as to rebuild institutions and capacities, and to bring international agreements and treaties to bear upon the operation of economic and political systems.

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