



News Release

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NEW FILM SERIES TAKES ON CULTURE OF SILENCE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

*First Global Broadcast — Women on the Frontline — Presented by Annie Lennox
on BBC World, Tomorrow, 18 April 2008 at 1930 GMT*

United Nations, Geneva, 17 April 2008 — This is an unfortunate anniversary.

Fourteen years ago, in April 1994, news got out that ethnic violence in Kigali was spreading throughout Rwanda. Since then, the world community has struggled to explain how the genocide of 800,000 people happened in full view, but less discussed is the ongoing impact of the rape and other forms of sexual violence committed against hundreds of thousands of women.

Violence against women is the theme of *Women on the Frontline*, a series of seven films being broadcast for the first time tomorrow Friday night by BBC World at 1930 GMT to about 300 million households to help peel away the silence surrounding the brutality of gender-based violence that crosses all borders.

“Violence against women threatens the lives of more young women than cancer, malaria or war,” said Annie Lennox, the British singer who presents the series of investigative reports. “It affects one in three women world-wide. It leaves women mentally scarred for life, and it is usually inflicted by a family member.”

Unfortunately, when it comes to war, the use of rape as a weapon continues.

- In Rwanda, according to the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, up to half a million women were raped during the 1994 genocide.
- In Sierra Leone, a reported 50,000-64,000 internally displaced women have experienced sexual violence at the hands of armed combatants.
- In a recent survey, more than half of all women in Lofa County in northern Liberia experienced at least one incident of sexual violence during the 1999-2003 conflict. While 90 percent of these women experienced at least one incident of physical violence and almost half of the women reported more than four instances in which they were required to have sex for favours.
- During the current post-election conflict in Kenya, which has killed over 1,000 people and displaced more than 200,000, the Nairobi Women’s Hospital and the Coast General Hospital in Mombasa reported a two- to threefold increase over the previous year in the number of women and children seeking treatment for sexual assault, especially gang rapes by men.

“Even where there is no war, women’s bodies continue to be battlegrounds,” said Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, the Executive Director of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund. “Women and girls are at risk of violence when carrying out essential daily activities — within their homes, or while walking, taking public transport to work, collecting water or firewood. Demanding the end of violence against women is about protecting human rights and

ensuring that women live in safety and dignity.”

According to UN figures, at least one in every three women worldwide is likely to be beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime, and one in five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape. Trafficking, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, dowry murder, “honour” killings and female infanticide are also part of the problem.

“The gaps in addressing violence against women are in terms of political will, resources and the strong involvement of men and boys in insisting on zero tolerance. If we can’t put an end to the pandemic of violence against women, we can’t achieve any of the other agreed goals: development, equality or peace,” said Joanne Sandler, acting Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

The UN Secretary-General has acknowledged the depth of the problem by launching a multi-year campaign eight weeks ago to eliminate violence against women and girls. Throughout the UN, a number of agencies are involved in various aspects of fighting violence against women.

In Mauritania, as shown on *Women on the Frontline*, women should not have boyfriends. If women are raped, they are considered at fault and imprisoned.

“We found girls who said they had been raped and who were being sent to prison for the simple reason that there was no tangible proof of this violence,” said Zeinabou Mint Taleb Moussa, a lawyer who heads the Mauritanian Association for Maternal and Child Health. “I would prefer them to go through the justice system or even better, I would prefer that the boys are arrested and the girls are recognized as victims.”

Women on the Frontline highlights the violence women must still endure in their daily lives and how they cope with it. The seven countries featured are Austria, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mauritania, Morocco, Nepal and Turkey.

A number of UN agencies, including UNFPA and UNIFEM, donor countries such as Austria, non-governmental organizations and other partners provided information and support for the investigative reports.

“On the Frontline has gone behind the lines with rebels and filmed among violent street gangs but this time we’ve taken the frontline mostly into the home, where even after 20 years in production, I’m still shocked to see how many obstacles lie between women and equality, and the violence they must still endure,” said Robert Lamb, Executive Director of the series.

The seven films cover Nepal, where thousands of women are trafficked each year; Turkey, where killing in the name of honour continues; Morocco, where women political activists who have survived torture and imprisonment testify before a government truth and reconciliation commission; the DRC, where women bear the brunt of a 10-year war in the eastern provinces; Colombia, where women have been tortured in the shadow of a guerilla war; Mauritania, where women who have been raped may go to prison; and Austria, where, under a new law, perpetrators of domestic violence are forced to leave home.

For more information, see the [series brochure](#). Consult the broadcast schedules on [dev.tv](#) and [BBC World](#).
