

CRS Report for Congress

United Nations System Efforts to Address Violence Against Women

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United Nations System Efforts to Address Violence Against Women

Summary

The United Nations (U.N.) system supports a number of programs that address international violence against women (VAW). These activities, which are implemented by 32 U.N. entities, range from large-scale interagency initiatives to smaller grants and programs that are implemented by a range of partners, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), national governments, and individual U.N. agencies. U.N. member states, including the United States, address VAW by ratifying multilateral treaties, adopting resolutions and decisions, and supporting U.N. mechanisms and bodies that focus on the issue.

Many U.N. activities and mechanisms address VAW directly, while others focus on it in the context of broader issues such as humanitarian assistance, U.N. peacekeeping, and global health. U.N. entities do not specifically track the cost of programs or activities with anti-VAW components. As a result, it is unclear how much the U.N. system, including individual U.N. agencies, funds, and programs, spends annually on programs to combat violence against women.

The U.S. government supports many activities that, either in whole or in part, work to combat international violence against women. Some experts argue that when considering the most effective ways to address VAW on an international scale, the United States should take into account the efforts of international organizations such as the United Nations. Were Congress to decide to use U.N. mechanisms to combat VAW, a number of programs and options might be considered. Congress has appropriated funds to the U.N. Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women, for example, as well as to U.N. agencies, funds, and programs that address types or circumstances of violence against women and girls. These include the World Health Organization (WHO), U.N. Development Program (UNDP), the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Senate has also given its advice and consent for U.S. ratification of treaties that address international violence against women and girls—including the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

This report supplements CRS Report RL33438, *International Violence Against Women: U.S. Response and Policy Issues*. It provides an overview of recent U.N. efforts to address VAW by the Secretary-General and highlights key U.N. interagency efforts. The report also discusses selected U.N. funds, programs, and agencies that address international violence against women. It does not measure the extent to which VAW is directly addressed or is part of a larger initiative or program. This report will be updated as events warrant.

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United Nations System Efforts to Address Violence Against Women

Current Status

Since the late 1990s, the United Nations (U.N.) organization has increasingly recognized violence against women (hereafter VAW) as a global health concern and violation of human rights. Ongoing U.N. system efforts to address VAW range from large-scale interagency initiatives to smaller grants and programs implemented by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), national governments, and individual U.N. agencies. A number of U.N. system activities address VAW directly; however, many are also implemented in the context of broader issues such as humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, global health, and human rights. Most U.N. entities do not specifically track the cost of programs or activities with anti-VAW components. Therefore, it is unclear how much the U.N. system, including individual U.N. agencies and programs, spends annually on programs to combat violence against women.

U.N. member states collectively address VAW through the work of U.N. bodies such as the General Assembly, Security Council, and Economic and Social Council. Members of these bodies have adopted resolutions and decisions addressing VAW in general, and more specifically violence against women migrant workers, honor crimes against women and girls, trafficking in women and girls, sexual violence in conflict, VAW prevention, and women, peace, and security.¹ Many U.N. member states have also ratified international treaties that address violence against women, including the U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In addition, members of the U.N. Human Rights Council support the work of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences. U.N. member states also make voluntary contributions to U.N. funds and other mechanisms that address violence against women.

¹ See, for example, (1) U.N. General Assembly resolution 61/143, *Intensification of Efforts to Eliminate all Forms of Violence Against Women*, December 19, 2006; (2) U.N. General Assembly resolution 60/139, *Violence Against Women Migrant Workers*, December 16, 2005; (3) U.N. General Assembly resolution 60/139, *Working Towards the Elimination of Crimes Against Women and Girls Committed in the Name of Honour*, December 20, 2004; (4) U.N. General Assembly resolution 59/166, *Trafficking in Women and Girls*, December 20, 2004; (5) U.N. General Assembly resolution 62/134, *Eliminating Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence*, December 18, 2007; and (6) U.N. ECOSOC Resolution 2006/29, *Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Responses to Violence Against Women and Girls*, July 22, 2006; and (7) U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325(2000) on *Women, Peace, and Security*, October 31, 2000.

Since 2005, at the direction of U.N. member states, former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and current Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon have worked to coordinate and enhance anti-VAW activities among various U.N. entities. In late 2005, for example, as part of then-Secretary-General Annan's *In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women*, the U.N. Secretariat's Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) compiled an inventory of U.N. system activities that address violence against women. The Secretariat identified 32 U.N. entities that work to combat VAW on a global, national, or local level.² In February 2008, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched a U.N. systemwide public awareness campaign to end violence against women.

This report provides examples of recent U.N. system efforts to address VAW, including the Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence Against Women, anti-VAW initiatives of past and current U.N. Secretaries-General, and interagency activities. It also discusses selected U.N. agreements, mechanisms, agencies, funds, and programs that — either in whole or in part — work to eliminate violence against women. It does not assess the scope of U.N. anti-VAW activities or evaluate a U.N. entity's progress in achieving its goal. This report supplements CRS Report RL34438, *International Violence Against Women: U.S. Response and Policy Issues*.

Issues for Congress

When considering U.S. efforts to address violence against women internationally, Members of Congress may wish to take into account ongoing U.N. efforts to address the issue. Were Congress to decide to use U.N. mechanisms to combat VAW, a number of policy issues and U.N. programs might be considered.

Priorities and Resource Allocation

Some experts argue that providing financial or technical support to international organizations that address VAW is an effective use of U.S. resources. They maintain that such assistance benefits the United States because it allows the U.S. government to share anti-VAW costs and resources with other governments and organizations. Moreover, some maintain that U.S. support of U.N. anti-VAW activities may prevent duplication of anti-VAW programs. Others argue that the U.S. government should focus on its own anti-VAW activities, and emphasize that U.N. anti-VAW activities may not always align with U.S. foreign assistance priorities.

² The largest of these include the U.N. Development Program (UNDP), the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labor Organization (ILO), the U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA), the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), The U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). See *Preventing and Eliminating Violence Against Women: An Inventory of United Nations System Activities On Violence Against Women*, July 2007, and updated for July 2007 to July 2008, available at [<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/Inventory.update.oct.2007.as%20posted.pdf>].

Funding U.N. Anti-VAW Efforts

Some experts maintain that the U.S. government should increase its contributions to U.N. programs and mechanisms that combat violence against women — particularly the U.N. Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women.³ The Trust Fund is a multilateral U.N. mechanism that provides governments and NGOs with money specifically to address violence against women. It relies on voluntary contributions from U.N. member states, including the United States, which first contributed in FY2005.⁴ Policymakers, including some Members of Congress, have recognized the Fund as a possible tool for addressing international violence against women. Proposed legislation in the 110th Congress, for example, would increase U.S. contributions to the Fund.⁵

A number of other U.N. agencies, funds, and programs work to eliminate violence against women. These include offices and departments funded through the U.N. Regular Budget, such as the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). U.N.-specialized agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labor Organization (ILO) also support anti-VAW activities through their regular budgets. An additional number of U.N. programs and funds rely on voluntary contributions from member states to support anti-VAW activities. These include the U.N. Development Program (UNDP), U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).⁶

United States Anti-VAW Activities in U.N. Fora

The United States may address VAW through several U.N. mechanisms, including multilateral treaties that focus on types or circumstances of violence against women. The U.S. Senate, for example, has provided its advice and consent for ratification of the U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Trafficking Protocol). Other multilateral treaties that address VAW include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the U.N. Convention on the Rights

³ See, for example, "Violence Against Women Expert Lauds Foreign Appropriations Subcommittee for Increasing Funds for UNIFEM and Its Trust Fund," Family Violence Prevention Fund press release, June 24, 2004.

⁴ For further discussion of the Trust Fund, including U.S. contributions, see the "Key U.N. System Efforts" section.

⁵ See S. 2279, the International Violence Against Women Act, 2008, which authorizes appropriations of \$5 million for the Trust Fund from FY2008 to FY2012 through the International Organizations and Programs Account. Also see H.R. 5927, the International Violence Against Women Act of 2008, which authorizes appropriations of \$5 million from FY2009 to FY2013.

⁶ For more information on the anti-VAW activities of these U.N. entities, see the "Selected U.N. Commissions, Departments, and Specialized Agencies" section.

of the Child (CRC). The United States has not ratified CEDAW or CRC, however, because of concerns over U.S. sovereignty.⁷

The United States may also address VAW by promoting or advocating resolutions and decisions in U.N. fora such as the General Assembly, Security Council, and Economic and Social Council. In March 2007, for example, the U.S. government drafted a resolution on forced and early marriage during the 51st Session on the Commission on the Status of Women.⁸ In October 2007, U.S. representatives to the United Nations also advocated the adoption of a General Assembly resolution condemning the use of rape as an instrument of state policy.⁹ In 2000, the United States also supported the adoption of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security.¹⁰

U.N. Definition of Violence Against Women

The U.N. General Assembly was the first international body to agree on a definition of violence against women. On December 20, 1993, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW).¹¹ The Declaration, which was supported by the U.S. government, describes VAW as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”¹² Though non-binding, DEVAW provides a standard for U.N. agencies and NGOs urging national governments to strengthen their efforts to combat VAW, as well as for governments encouraging other nations to combat

⁷ For the Administration position on CEDAW, see Letter from Secretary of State Colin Powell to Senator Joseph Biden, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, July 8, 2002 in *Digest of United States Practice in International Law, 2002*, Office of the Legal Adviser, U.S. Department of State, International Law Institute, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 277. For the Administration position on CRC, see *United States Participation in the United Nations: Report by the Secretary of State to the Congress for Year 2002*, Department of State Publication 11086, October 2003, p. 70. For further details on the Trafficking Protocol, CEDAW and CRC, see the “Selected U.N. Conferences, Agreements, and Resolutions,” section.

⁸ U.N. document E/CN.6/2007/L.4, March 2, 2007.

⁹ The resolution was adopted on December 18, 2007. (See U.N. document, A/RES/62/134, *Eliminating Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence in All Their Manifestations, Including in Conflict and Related Situations*.) For more information on U.S. efforts to support the resolution, see [<http://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/93618.htm>].

¹⁰ For further information on U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325, see the “Selected U.N. Conferences, Agreements, and Resolutions” section.

¹¹ U.N. document, A/RES/48/104, December 20, 1993. DEVAW was adopted without a vote by the 48th Session of the U.N. General Assembly.

¹² The term “gender-based violence” is broader than VAW because it can include violence perpetrated against men and boys in addition to women and girls. In many instances, however, the two terms are used interchangeably.

violence against women.¹³ Specifically, the Declaration calls on countries to take responsibility for combating VAW, emphasizing that “states should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination. States should pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating violence against women.”¹⁴

Despite the international adoption of DEVAW, governments, organizations, and cultures continue to define VAW in a number of ways, taking into account unique factors and circumstances. How VAW is defined has implications for policymakers because the definition affects the types of violence that are measured and addressed.

Key U.N. System Efforts

Secretary-General Initiatives

U.N. Study on Violence Against Women. On July 6, 2006, then-U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan published an *In-depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women*.¹⁵ The study provides a statistical overview of types of VAW, including information on its causes and consequences.¹⁶ It also examines U.N. system efforts to address VAW, identifying 32 U.N. entities that work to combat types and circumstances of VAW on a global, national, or local level.¹⁷ The study discusses gaps and challenges in U.N. system anti-VAW activities, including (1) implementation of legal and policy frameworks that guide U.N. system efforts to eliminate VAW, (2) data collection and research, (3) awareness raising and dissemination of best practices, (4) resource mobilization, and (5) coordination mechanisms at the international level.¹⁸

To address these issues, the study recommends that U.N. resources addressing VAW should be “increased significantly,” and highlights the need to provide countries with technical support that promotes best practices for VAW data collection and research. The study also urges national governments to establish

¹³ *A Concise Encyclopedia of the United Nations*, edited by Helmut Volger, Kluwer Law International, The Hague, Netherlands, 2002, p. 671.

¹⁴ U.N. document, A/RES/48/104, December 20, 1993, article 4.

¹⁵ U.N. document, A/61/122/Add.1, July 6, 2006. The study was mandated by U.N. General Assembly resolution 58/185 on December 22, 2003. It was prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women in the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs and conducted within existing financial resources.

¹⁶ For a discussion of global statistics and research on the causes and consequences of VAW, see CRS Report RL34438, *International Violence Against Women: U.S. Response and Policy Issues*, by Luisa Blanchfield, Rhoda Margesson, Clare Ribando Seelke, Tiaji Salaam-Blyther, and Nina M. Serafino.

¹⁷ U.N. document, A/61/122/Add.1, July 6, 2006, p. 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

national action plans on combating violence against women. To improve coordination among U.N. agencies on VAW-related issues, it recommends that the Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women leads a systemwide coordination effort through a newly established Task Force on Violence Against Women in the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE).¹⁹

On December 19, 2006, in response to the Secretary-General's study, the U.N. General Assembly adopted resolution 61/143, which calls on U.N. member states and the Secretary-General to intensify efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women.²⁰ The study and the subsequent resolution have contributed to recent U.N. efforts to enhance current U.N. anti-VAW efforts and develop new strategies to address the issue.

Campaign to End Violence Against Women. On February 25, 2008, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the launch of the U.N. Campaign to End Violence Against Women to “mobilize public opinion to ensure that policy makers at the highest level work to prevent and eradicate violence against women.”²¹ The campaign, which runs from 2008 to 2015, focuses on three key areas: (1) global advocacy, (2) U.N. leadership by example, and (3) regional, national, and international partnerships. According to the Secretary-General, the campaign builds on the momentum created by recent General Assembly and Security Council actions on all forms of violence against women,²² as well as the work of women activists, NGOs, and other civil society organizations. The Secretary-General stated that he will urge states to review all applicable laws to ensure VAW is always criminalized; personally approach world leaders to spur action through national campaigns; form a global network of male leaders to assist the U.N. Secretariat in creating VAW awareness among men and boys; and promote a high-level event in

¹⁹ The current Special Advisor is Ms. Rachel Mayanja of Uganda. IANWGE is a network of gender focal points from U.N. specialized agencies, offices, funds and programs. It works to promote gender equality throughout the U.N. system. For more information, see the “Selected Interagency Activities” section.

²⁰ U.N. document, A/RES/61/143, December 19, 2006. Specifically, the resolution urges U.N. member states to (1) take action to eliminate all forms of VAW through a more systematic, comprehensive, multi-sectoral, and sustained approach through national action plans; (2) end impunity for VAW by prosecuting and punishing all perpetrators; (3) review, revise, amend, or abolish laws and policies that discriminate against women; and (4) strengthen national health and social infrastructures to address the health consequences of VAW. The resolution also encourages states to increase voluntary contributions for U.N. activities that work toward eliminating VAW, and requests the Secretary-General to establish a coordinated database on the extent, nature, and consequences of all forms of VAW (comprised primarily of data submitted by U.N. member states).

²¹ More information on the campaign is available at [<http://endviolence.un.org/>].

²² This includes U.N. General Assembly resolution 62/134, *Eliminating Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence*, December 18, 2007, and U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325(2000) on *Women, Peace, and Security*, October 31, 2000.

2010 to review accomplishments of the campaign, share best practices, and plan future actions.²³

The U.N. Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women

The U.N. Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women (the Trust Fund) is the only multilateral mechanism that specifically focuses on government and NGO efforts to combat VAW on regional, national, and local levels.²⁴ The Trust Fund is administered by the U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and relies on voluntary contributions from national governments, the non-profit and private sectors, and individuals. Top government donors include Spain, the Netherlands, Norway, the United States, Finland, Japan, Italy, Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Austria, Denmark, and Iceland.

Since it became operational in 1997, the Fund has distributed approximately \$24 million in small grants to over 263 anti-VAW initiatives in approximately 115 countries. Money from the Trust Fund is distributed primarily to non-profit organizations. U.N. agencies and funds are not eligible to receive financial assistance from the Trust Fund. In 2007, the Fund distributed 29 grants to groups in 35 developing countries (a total of \$5.1 million). The grants, which generally range from \$300,000 to \$1 million, focus on strengthening national policies and laws addressing violence against women. They also support programs that work with men and boys, address the link between VAW and HIV/AIDS, and support public education and awareness campaigns. Trust Fund grantees in 2007 include the Women's Legal Aid Center in Tanzania, Africa; the International Rescue Committee (IRC); the International Center for the Education of Women (ICEW); and the Ethiopian Women Lawyer's Association.²⁵

Recognizing the relatively small amount of money administered by the Trust Fund, the Secretary-General's 2006 study on violence against women recommended that U.N. member states and other international donors "increase significantly the financial support for work on violence against women in the United Nations ... including the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women."²⁶ The IANWGE Task Force on Violence Against Women is currently working with the U.N. Division on the Advancement of Women (DAW) to develop a new framework for the Trust Fund.

²³ U.N. press release, "The Secretary-General Remarks to the Commission on the Status of Women," New York, February 25, 2008, at [<http://endviolence.un.org/statements.shtml>].

²⁴ The Trust Fund was established by U.N. General Assembly resolution 50/166 adopted on December 22, 1995. For more information, see [http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/trust_fund.php].

²⁵ A full list of 2007 Trust Fund grantees is available at [http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/trust_fund_grantees.php].

²⁶ U.N. document, A/61/122/Add.1, July 6, 2006, p. 113.

Table 1. U.S. Contributions to the UNIFEM Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence Against Women, FY2005-FY2009
(\$ in millions)

Fiscal Year	Administration Request	Actual Funding (unless otherwise indicated)
2005	—	.992
2006	—	1.485
2007	—	1.485
2008	—	1.785 (estimate)
2009	—	TBD

Source: Congressional Budget Justifications, FY2006-FY2009, U.S. Department of State.

The U.S. government has contributed to the Trust Fund since 2005, with funding levels ranging from \$990,000 in FY2005 to \$1.78 million in FY2008 (see **Table 1**). The George W. Bush Administration has never requested funding for the Trust Fund. Congress typically allocates money during the appropriations process. Funding for the Trust Fund is drawn from the International Organizations and Programs account and generally supplements U.S. voluntary contributions to UNIFEM.²⁷

Selected Interagency Activities

U.N. funds and programs are engaged in several interagency activities that address specific types and circumstances of VAW directly, or deal with VAW as part of a broader agenda.

Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE). IANWGE is a network of designated gender focal points from U.N. agencies, offices, funds, and programs. It comprises 60 members representing 25 entities of the U.N. system, and supports a Task Force on Violence Against Women that aims to strengthen U.N. system-wide anti-VAW efforts.²⁸ The Task Force is currently leading pilot projects in 10 countries to implement joint programming on violence against women.²⁹ Under the projects, U.N. country teams work with national

²⁷ In FY2007, the United States contributed \$3.218 million to UNIFEM. In FY2008, the United States estimates it will contribute \$3.571 million. The President's FY2009 request for UNIFEM funding is \$950,000. (See *Congressional Budget Justification, Foreign Operations, Fiscal Year 2009*, p. 123).

²⁸ Co-conveners of the Task Force are the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) and the U.N. Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW).

²⁹ The 10 countries participating in the pilot project are Burkina Faso, Chile, Fiji, Jamaica, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Paraguay, Philippines, Rwanda, and Yemen. A coordinator for the
(continued...)

governments to develop individual work plans that will increase national capacity to prepare, implement, monitor, and evaluate national efforts to end violence against women. It is anticipated that the U.N. Trust Fund to Eliminate Violence Against Women will serve as the funding mechanism for the Task Force.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). IASC is the primary U.N. mechanism for interagency coordination of humanitarian assistance. Participants include U.N. entities, international organizations, and NGOs. IASC supports a Task Force on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance that, among other things, works to carry out programs that prevent and respond to gender-based violence. In 2005, the Task Force published a manual, *Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings*, to assist communities, governments, and humanitarian organizations (including U.N. agencies) in establishing and coordinating interventions to prevent and respond to sexual violence during the early phases of emergencies.³⁰ The Task Force meets every four to six weeks and includes representatives from over 20 U.N. entities and related NGOs.

U.N. Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (U.N. Action). U.N. Action draws 12 U.N. entities together to improve and better coordinate the U.N. system response to sexual violence before and after conflict.³¹ It operates through existing coordination mechanisms, including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and focuses on building capacity and training advisers in anti-VAW programming at the country level. It aims to strengthen medical and legal services to survivors and, in the long term, address gender imbalances. It also works to raise public awareness of sexual violence and urges governments to address the issues.

Selected U.N. Conferences, Agreements, and Resolutions

This section discusses selected U.N. conferences, agreements, resolutions, and multilateral treaties that address VAW, either in whole or in part. It does not assess U.N. member state compliance with or implementation of these mechanisms.

²⁹ (...continued)

projects was hired in November 2007, and initial work has started in 9 of the 10 countries. Two countries, the Philippines and Rwanda, have held national planning workshops.

³⁰ The Guidelines are available at [http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/products/docs/tfgender_GBVGuidelines2005.pdf].

³¹ The 12 agencies, offices, or programs include U.N. Department of Political Affairs; U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations (Best Practices); U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Joint U.N. Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS); U.N. Development Program (UNDP); U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA); U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF); U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); World Food Program (WFP); and the World Health Organization (WHO).

U.N. World Conferences on Women

Since 1974, the United Nations has held four World Conferences on Women.³² Recognition of VAW as an international human rights issue, however, was first achieved at the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985, and reaffirmed at the Fourth World Conference in Beijing in 1995. The Nairobi Conference's main outcome document, negotiated and adopted by 152 U.N. member states — including the United States — laid the groundwork for future international anti-VAW initiatives. It noted that VAW was a “major obstacle to the achievement of peace and the other objectives of the [U.N. Women's] Decade and should be given special attention,” and stated that member states should formulate legal measures to assist victims and establish national mechanisms to address VAW within families and society.³³ At the Fourth World Conference in Beijing, U.N. member states (including the United States) identified violence against women as one of the “12 critical areas of concern” for women, and also agreed that VAW “constitutes a violation of basic human rights and is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of [Women's] equality, development, and peace.”³⁴

U.N. Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)³⁵

CEDAW is the only multilateral treaty that specifically focuses on the comprehensive rights of women. It calls for parties to eliminate discrimination against women in all areas of life, including healthcare, education, employment, domestic relations, law, and political participation. The Convention entered into force in 1981, and 185 U.N. member states are currently party to the treaty. The United States led the drafting of CEDAW but is one of seven U.N. member states that has not ratified the Convention. The United States signed CEDAW in 1980, but the full Senate has not considered the treaty for advice and consent to ratification

³² In 1974, the United Nations coordinated and led the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City. The second conference was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1980, and the third conference was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985. The first conference inaugurated the U.N. “Decade on Women,” which spanned from 1976 to 1985, and included two additional World Conferences on Women. (The United Nations periodically designates years to raise awareness of and highlight disadvantaged groups. Examples include the Year of Refugees, of Youth, and of the Disabled.) Additional information on the four U.N. World Conferences on Women is available at [<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/index.html>] and [<http://www.un.org/esa/devagenda/gender.html>].

³³ U.N. document, A/CONF.116/28/Rev:1, 1986, *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise Achievements of the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace*, Chapter 1, Section A: The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, paragraph 258.

³⁴ Platform for Action, The U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, Action for Equality, Development and Peace, Beijing, China, September 1995, available at [<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm>].

³⁵ For further information on CEDAW, see CRS Report RL33652, *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): Congressional Issues*, by Luisa Blanchfield.

because of concerns that it may undermine U.S. sovereignty. Though the Convention text does not directly address VAW, its implementing body, the CEDAW committee, adopted a general recommendation affirming that gender-based violence is a form of gender discrimination. The committee defined gender-based violence as “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.”³⁶

U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

CRC is an international treaty that requires parties to ensure that all children have certain rights, regardless of sex.³⁷ Article 19 of CRC specifically addresses violence against children, stating that parties shall “protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.” CRC was unanimously adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on November 20, 1989, and entered into force on September 2, 1990. The United States was an active participant in the Convention’s drafting. It joined in the General Assembly consensus adopting the Convention, and signed the treaty on February 16, 1995. Successive Administrations have chosen not to transmit CRC to the Senate for its advice and consent. As of February 12, 2008, 193 parties have ratified the Convention — only the United States and Somalia have not ratified the treaty.³⁸

Trafficking in Persons Protocol³⁹

In 1999, U.N. member states drafted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children. On November 15, 2000, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Convention on Transnational Crime, which includes the Protocol on Trafficking. The Convention and its three Protocols were designed to enable countries to work together more closely against criminals engaged in cross-border crimes, including trafficking in women and girls. The Protocol on Trafficking commits countries to enforce relevant laws against traffickers, provide some assistance and protect trafficking victims, and share

³⁶ General Recommendation No. 19 (11th session) on Violence Against Women, 1992, available at [<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom19>].

³⁷ In addition to sex, the Convention also states that children have certain rights regardless of “color ... language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.” (Preamble.) The Convention defines a child as “every human being below the age of eighteen years.” (Article 1.) The text of the Convention is available at [<http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>].

³⁸ A list of countries that have signed or ratified the Convention is available at [<http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/ratification/11.htm>].

³⁹ This section was drawn from CRS Report RL34317, *Trafficking in Persons: U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress*, by Clare Ribando Seelke and Alison Siskin. Text of the Protocol is available at [http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents_2/convention_%20traff_eng.pdf].

intelligence and increase border security cooperation with other countries. The Protocol entered into force on December 25, 2003. The United States signed the treaty in December 2000, and the Senate gave its advice and consent to ratification on October 7, 2005. The United States became party to the Protocol on December 3, 2005.⁴⁰ At present, 115 countries are party to the Protocol.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325

On October 31, 2000, the U.N. Security Council adopted resolution 1325 relating to women, peace, and security. The resolution, which is strongly supported by the United States, addresses the impact of war and conflict on women and highlights the need for protection of women and girls from human rights abuses. Specifically, the resolution calls on all parties to armed conflict to “take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict.”⁴¹ It also urges U.N. member states and the U.N. Secretary-General to work toward increased representation and participation of women in all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions that address conflict resolution, management, and prevention.⁴² U.N. efforts in this area have intensified since 2003 and 2004, following media reports on sexual abuse and exploitation of vulnerable civilians by U.N. peacekeeping personnel.

Selected U.N. Commissions, Departments, and Specialized Agencies

This section highlights selected U.N. bodies that — either in whole or in part — address international violence against women, and provides examples of VAW-related activities. It does not measure the extent to which VAW is directly addressed or is part of a larger initiative or program.⁴³

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

CSW, a functional Commission under the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), is the principal intergovernmental policymaking body on women’s

⁴⁰ The instrument of U.S. ratification was deposited on November 2, 2005.

⁴¹ U.N. document, S/RES/1325 (2000), October 31, 2000, available at [<http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/res1325.pdf>].

⁴² In addition, the resolution “urges member states to increase their voluntary, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts.” (See paragraph 7.) Additional information on the resolution is available at [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/taskforces/wps/national_level_impl.html].

⁴³ For information on United Nations and U.S. funding of U.N. system agencies, funds, and programs, see CRS Report RL33611, *United Nations System Funding: Congressional Issues*, by Marjorie Anne Browne and Kennon H. Nakamura.

issues in the United Nations.⁴⁴ It meets annually at U.N. Headquarters and is composed of 45 member state representatives elected by ECOSOC members (other states serve as observers).⁴⁵ CSW observes, monitors, and implements measures for the advancement of women, including those that address violence against women. It also reviews and supports the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into the U.N. system. At its 51st session in 2007, CSW member states focused on violence against women and girls as a priority issue area. At its 52nd session in 2008, CSW members adopted a resolution on ending female genital mutilation, which urges states to condemn all harmful traditional practices, and take necessary measures, including enacting and enforcing legislation, to prohibit the practice.⁴⁶

Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)⁴⁷

DPKO prepares and manages U.N. peacekeeping operations. It focuses on all types and circumstances of VAW, particularly sexual exploitation and abuse of vulnerable women and girls by peacekeeping personnel. In order to prevent and address such abuses, each peacekeeping mission has a gender unit that supports regional and international initiatives addressing violence against women. The gender units support legal reform processes in particular countries and serve as resources for national authorities and law reform organizations. Gender units also encourage collaboration among law enforcement, victim support organizations, and the judiciary, and work to ensure that women's NGOs are included in national efforts to end violence against women. Moreover, several peacekeeping units — including those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, and Timor-Leste — have conducted training activities for peacekeeping personnel on preventing and responding to violence against women.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ CSW was established in February 1946.

⁴⁵ The United States is a current member of CSW. Its term will expire in 2012. For more information, see [<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/>].

⁴⁶ See (1) CSW 51st Session, "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child," at [<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/51sess.htm>], and (2) U.N. document, E/CN.6/2008/L.2/Rev.1, *Ending Female Genital Mutilation*, March 2008.

⁴⁷ For further information on U.N. efforts to address sexual abuse and exploitation and prevent trafficking in persons, see *Report to the Congress on United Nations Efforts to Prevent Trafficking in Persons and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in U.N. Peacekeeping Missions*, submission to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the U.S. Senate and to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, of the U.S. House of Representatives by the State Department, February-August 2007. (As requested in Section 104(e) of P.L. 109-164, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, FY2006.)

⁴⁸ For more information on DPKO efforts to address sexual exploitation and abuse, see [<http://www.un.org/depts/dpko/CDT/about.html>]. For further discussion of U.N. peacekeeping and allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation and the U.N. response, see CRS Report RL33700, *United Nations Peacekeeping: Issues for Congress*, by Marjorie Ann Browne.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)

DESA supports two key offices that coordinate or analyze violence against women activities at the United Nations.⁴⁹ First, the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) supports and services agenda items and discussions for U.N. intergovernmental bodies that promote gender equality, including the General Assembly, ECOSOC, and the Commission on the Status of Women. DAW also conducts research and compiles reports for the Secretary-General on violence against women. In 2006, for example, DAW prepared the *Secretary-General's In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women*.⁵⁰ It also conducts follow-up workshops and activities related to the study.

The Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women (OSAGI), which was established in March 1997, supports the U.N. Special Adviser on Gender Issues.⁵¹ The Office promotes interagency collaboration to eliminate VAW and develops new strategies, programs, and policies to address gender equality in the U.N. system. It also coordinates and implements the outcomes and the follow-up to the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, and U.N. Security Council 1325 Resolution on Women, Peace, and Security, both of which address violence against women.

U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

UNIFEM is one of the leading U.N. entities that addresses violence against women. It administers the U.N. Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women, and works to raise awareness of VAW in local and national governments — particularly among law enforcement, parliamentarians, government ministries, and the judiciary. UNIFEM also aims to strengthen anti-VAW legislation and policies related to domestic violence, trafficking, and forced marriage, and assists governments and organizations in implementing such efforts. Other recent areas of focus include sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict settings in sub-Saharan Africa — including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda — and trafficking in women in Southeast Asia.⁵² UNIFEM also supports the data collection and research on international violence against women.

⁴⁹ In addition, the DESA U.N. Statistics Division collects, processes, and disseminates statistical information on women's issues, including violence against women. It works to standardize statistical methods, definitions, and classifications, publishing *The World's Women: Progress in Statistics* every five years.

⁵⁰ U.N. document, A/61/122/Add.1, July 6, 2006.

⁵¹ Ms. Rachel Mayanja, appointed in 1994, is the current Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues. See [<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/homethepost.htm>].

⁵² For more information on UNIFEM activities to address violence against women, see [http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/].

U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

OHCHR, which works to promote and protect human rights established under the U.N. Charter and international human rights instruments, supports research and operational activities that address violence against women.⁵³ OHCHR commissions research and analyze access to justice for victims of sexual violence, with a focus on the prosecution of rape under international humanitarian and human rights law. OHCHR field operations work to reduce or eliminate VAW at the national and regional level, providing technical assistance in law reform and government monitoring, and organizing training activities for governments and members of civil society.

OHCHR also supports U.N. Human Rights Council country and thematic rapporteurs who address types and circumstances of violence against women and girls. This includes the position of Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences, which was established in 1994 by a U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution.⁵⁴ According to the resolution, the Special Rapporteur shall “seek and receive information on violence against women, its causes and consequences from Governments, treaty bodies, specialized agencies, other special rapporteurs responsible for various human rights questions and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and to respond effectively to such information.”⁵⁵ The Rapporteur shall also “recommend measures, ways and means ... to eliminate violence against women and its causes, and to remedy its consequences.” Other rapporteurs who address VAW include the Special Rapporteurs on Trafficking in Persons; the Sale of Children; and Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions.⁵⁶

World Health Organization (WHO)

The WHO addresses VAW through various activities, including policy formulation, program guidance, advocacy, and research. Specifically, it has developed a series of VAW norms and guidelines and conducted studies on VAW

⁵³ For further information on OHCHR efforts to address VAW, see [<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/ViolenceAgainstWomen.aspx>].

⁵⁴ The current Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women is Dr. Yakin Ertürk of Turkey. Her most recent report, *Indicators on Violence against Women and State Response*, was issued on January 29, 2008 (U.N. document A/HRC/7/6) and is available at [<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/7session/A-HRC-7-6.doc>]. For more information on the work of the Special Rapporteur, see [<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/index.htm>].

⁵⁵ U.N. ECOSOC decision 1994/254, July 22, 1994.

⁵⁶ The Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Execution addresses honor killings, when women are killed to preserve the family honor; and femicide, when infants are killed because of their gender.

prevalence.⁵⁷ It also leads a research initiative to develop a network of researchers, policymakers, and activists to ensure VAW is addressed from a variety of disciplines.⁵⁸ Moreover, WHO develops training programs and provides technical support on sexual violence for healthcare providers in conflict areas, and works with partners to develop a framework for integrating HIV prevention activities into intimate partner and sexual violence programs. WHO also works to raise public awareness of VAW, particularly in the context of HIV/AIDS. Such activities include VAW sensitization programs for civil servants, journalists, healthcare providers, and policymakers.

U.N. Development Program (UNDP)

UNDP addresses VAW through programs and activities that involve trafficking, HIV/AIDS, and disaster, conflict, and post-conflict situations. It works with governments to develop national strategies to protect victims of intimate partner violence, and aims to incorporate gender perspectives into crises prevention and recovery in conflict situations. UNDP also promotes VAW awareness through national and local campaigns, including the “16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence” campaign and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. In addition, UNDP works on a national level to disseminate knowledge and awareness of VAW through radio, television, and posters. In addition, it supports a website, GenderNet, which facilitates discussions on gender and violence against women.⁵⁹

U.N. Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF works to protect children’s rights, provide for their basic needs, and expand their opportunities.⁶⁰ The majority of UNICEF’s violence against girls programs focus on capacity building, with an emphasis on awareness-raising and research. On a global level, for example, UNICEF has developed policies to protect women and girls from sexual abuse by U.N. staff and other aid workers. On a country level, it addresses different manifestations of VAW, which vary depending by country or region. National UNICEF programs address female genital cutting, early marriage, trafficking, domestic violence, school-related violence, and violence in armed conflict. UNICEF also assists governments in drafting anti-VAW

⁵⁷ Norms and guidelines include *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women*; *Preventing Child Maltreatment: A Guide to Taking Action and Generating Evidence*; and *Preventing Injuries and Violence: A Guide for Ministries of Health*.

⁵⁸ The Sexual Violence Research Initiative is a WHO/Global Forum for Health Service program. It has developed a research agenda and studied women’s responses to sexual violence. For more information, see [<http://www.svri.org/>].

⁵⁹ Further information on UNDP women’s programs is available at [<http://www.undp.org/women/>]. For more information on GenderNet, see [<http://www.gendernet.at/opencms/opencms/gnet/de/>].

⁶⁰ For more information on UNICEF and its anti-VAW programs, see [<http://www.unicef.org/>].

legislation, and works to raise VAW awareness among teachers, police, and the judiciary.

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)⁶¹

UNHCR's mandate is to provide protection to refugees and other populations of concern. Since 2003, it has promoted and encouraged prevention and treatment guidelines in field operations to address the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence.⁶² In March 2008, UNHCR published the *UNHCR Handbook on the Protection of Displaced Women and Girls*, to distribute to UNHCR staff and partners. In addition, UNHCR (along with nine other U.N. agencies) recently signed an interagency statement to address female genital mutilation.⁶³

UNHCR has also sponsored regional and country-level training programs on VAW prevention and response for its staff and implementing partners. Standard operating procedures on the prevention and response to VAW were expected to be in place in all field operations by December 2007. In addition, to further establish an organizational strategy on this issue, UNHCR has set up an independent evaluation of its efforts towards prevention of and response to gender-based violence, which began at the end of 2007.

U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)⁶⁴

UNOCHA coordinates humanitarian response, policy development, and humanitarian advocacy among U.N. agencies and national and international actors. It serves as the co-chair of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Task Force on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance, providing support for the development and implementation of Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines for gender-based violence interventions in humanitarian settings. UNOCHA also implements a confidential complaints mechanism on gender-based violence, and works to raise public awareness of the issue. The organization's Integrated Regional Information

⁶¹ This section was written by Rhoda Margesson, CRS Specialist in International Humanitarian Policy.

⁶² The UNHCR guidelines are complemented by the 2005 IASC guidelines on responding to sexual and gender-based violence. IASC guidelines focus on the emergency phase and while UNHCR guidelines focus more broadly on the displacement cycle.

⁶³ Other U.N. agencies that signed the interagency statement include OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNDP, U.N. Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIFEM and WHO. More information is available at [http://www.unifem.org/resources/item_detail.php?ProductID=110].

⁶⁴ This section was written by Rhoda Margesson, Specialist in International Humanitarian Policy.

Network (IRIN), for example, has produced several publications and videos on VAW in conflict and female genital cutting.⁶⁵

U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA)

UNFPA aims to help countries improve reproductive health and expand access to family planning services.⁶⁶ It addresses VAW through a combination of research-based and operational activities. On a global level, for example, UNFPA has undertaken studies on the socio-cultural context of VAW, and hosts workshops and meetings on sexual violence. It develops guidelines and tools to combat VAW, and supports sensitivity training for medical professionals.⁶⁷ On a national level, UNFPA works with governments to develop national strategies to address VAW prevention and protection, and provides counseling to girls who experience FGC or forced marriage. UNFPA also supports basic services to VAW victims, including legal and counseling services and access to shelter.⁶⁸

U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

UNODC is the guardian of the U.N. Trafficking Protocol. Its Global Program Against Trafficking in Human Beings, for example, assists member states to implement the Trafficking Protocol and prevent human trafficking. There are more than 30 UNODC technical cooperation trafficking projects underway. In February 2006, UNODC, the United States, and India launched a U.S. government-funded anti-trafficking initiative. The project provides training and awareness for law enforcement officers and strengthens their capacity to investigate and prosecute traffickers. UNODC also develops tools, handbooks, and manuals addressing the needs of women and children to support national legal and criminal justice reform efforts. It is currently working with law enforcement officials to create a guide on effective responses to violence against women.⁶⁹

International Labor Organization (ILO)

The ILO promotes internationally recognized human and labor rights. It supports a number of programs that combat trafficking and forced and bonded labor, many of which include gender-specific components. Through the International Program to Eliminate Child Labor (IPEC) for instance, ILO works with participating

⁶⁵ For more information on OCHA activities related to VAW, see [<http://ochaonline.un.org/HumanitarianIssues/ProtectionfromSexualExploitationandAbuse/tabid/1204/Default.aspx>].

⁶⁶ More information on UNFPA anti-VAW activities is available at [<http://www.unfpa.org/gender/violence/htm>].

⁶⁷ These programs have been tested in several countries, including Cape Verde, Ecuador, Lebanon, Lithuania, Russia, and Sri Lanka.

⁶⁸ For more information on UNFPA, see CRS Report RL32703, *The U.N. Population Fund: Background and the U.S. Funding Debate*, by Luisa Blanchfield.

⁶⁹ For more information on UNODC activities related to human trafficking, see [<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/index.html>].

governments to (1) prevent children from becoming child laborers; (2) remove children from hazardous work, including exploitative work like forced prostitution; and (3) offer children and their families education, income and employment opportunities.⁷⁰ The ILO Conditions of Work and Employment Program researches violence in the workplace, including violence against women. The ILO Labor Standards Department also conducts research on violence against migrant workers, particularly women, as well as violence against indigenous and tribal women workers.

Joint U.N. Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)

UNAIDS works with international partners to identify and address the possible links between HIV/AIDS and violence against women. It promotes education and awareness of HIV within international peacekeeping operations, and national uniformed services through training and distribution of peer education kits, which include sections on gender issues and sexual violence. UNAIDS has also worked in Southern and Eastern Africa to determine how to improve health services for women who have experienced violence. Furthermore, it supports regional task forces on VAW in emergency settings, collaborates with WHO to improve clinic services on sexual violence, and works with experts to develop cost estimates for integrating VAW awareness, prevention, and treatment into AIDS programs. In addition, the UNAIDS Global Coalition on Women and AIDS raises public awareness of HIV/AIDS and VAW linkages.⁷¹

⁷⁰ The United States provided \$13.9 million to IPEC in FY2007, and an estimated \$35.5 million in FY2008.

⁷¹ For more information on this initiative, see [<http://womenandaids.unaids.org/about.html>].