

More than 5 million join UNIFEM's campaign to

Say **NO** to Violence against Women

Nicole Kidman presents signatures to UN Secretary General

By 25 November a total of 5,066,549 people had added their names to UNIFEM's campaign to make ending violence against women a top priority for governments across the world. UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador Nicole Kidman presented the signatures to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon during a ceremony at UN headquarters on 25 November to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. **Say NO** is an Internet-based awareness raising and advocacy initiative launched by UNIFEM a year ago to feed into Ban Ki-moon's **UNiTE** campaign on the same issue.



In her opening speech at the event UNIFEM Executive Director Inés Alberdi pointed to recent news of atrocious crimes committed against women and girls. "In Somalia, a girl was stoned to death, after being raped. She had turned to the authorities for help; instead she was brutally murdered for alleged adultery. In Afghanistan, a group of young girls were attacked with acid, their faces disfigured. They had provoked the Taliban by going to school. Every day in South Kivu province, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an average of 40 women are reported to be raped. These are cases that have made headlines. Yet the vast majority of the crimes committed against women are still largely hidden from public view." She emphasised the importance of public awareness and social mobilisation to end the global pandemic of violence against women.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon thanked UNIFEM and underlined the need for decisive action. “We need laws that protect women and punish perpetrators. We need to enforce the laws that are already on the books and to put an end to the impunity that so often prevails. We need national plans that spell out how to raise public awareness and change attitudes, how to provide services for survivors, and – most importantly – how to prevent the abuse of women,” he said. “Our goal is ambitious: instead of having to say no to violence against women, we want to be able to say that there is no violence against women.”

Before presenting the signatures Nicole Kidman highlighted some experiences from the Say NO campaign. “We reached people in every corner of the world. A survivor of violence heard about it on Mexican TV and called my friends at UNIFEM to find out where she could sign her name. There was a young man from Scotland who posted the Say NO campaign on his Facebook page with a poem described as a “message for every man the world over” that imagined an end to violence against women and girls. I was moved by the photographs of people campaigning in Tanzania, wearing T-shirts with the Say NO message in Swahili. So many places are not internet wired, so Say NO moved from the computer to be passed sign-up card, by sign-up card, person to person.”

The campaign also received high-level governmental support. Representatives of 60 governments signed on as did 600 parliamentarians from over 70 countries. “This high-level support is crucial because without strong political will there will be no decisive action,” said Inés Alberdi. “Now we must use this momentum to implement laws and policies that are already in place. To protect women from violence and to respond to the needs of survivors we urge the adoption of accountability frameworks with agreed standards of protection and response, including prompt police response, health and legal services, shelters and safe options, national hotlines, an accountable judiciary, and national action plans.”

The Secretary General’s **UNiTE** to End Violence against Women campaign, which will run through to 2015, offers a blueprint for implementation and combined action. Partnerships between the UN and governments, civil society, the private sector, men and youth, and religious communities show great promise. Between now and 2015 all must work together to make implementation the top priority.