

## CONCEPT NOTE

### THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S SAFETY

NEW DELHI, INDIA 22 - 24 NOVEMBER 2010

#### Background

It is now widely accepted that violence against women is a direct violation of their human rights. Public and private expressions of violence are not mutually exclusive, rather they are mutually reinforcing. Violence against women and girls and various manifestations of inequality have a direct impact on how safe women feel in their daily lives at home, in their workplace and in public spaces. Lack of safety is a serious obstacle to achieving gender equality as it curtails women's mobility and limits their capacity to participate fully and freely as citizens. Both the causes and consequences of gender inequality and women's safety are interrelated and multifold, encompassing such diverse issues as access to basic services, employment, good governance, urban planning, and political participation.

Many international conventions and declarations have been adopted, and conferences and meetings organized to explore these violence against women and its ramifications. Some have been in place for a number of years, others are more recent : the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW, 1979); the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993); the Convention of Belém do Pará (1994); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995); the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign to End Violence Against Women (2008); and the ongoing campaign 16 days of Activism against Gender Violence which begins each year on November 25<sup>th</sup>, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women; to name a few. There has been renewed commitment and determination at the international level to tackle the issue of violence against women and gender equality in the past five years. These advances culminated in 2009 with the United Nations General Assembly's vote in favour of the creation of a single UN entity for women, effectively consolidating all of the UN bodies now working on related issues.

Over this period there have been developments aimed at tackling violence against women and increasing women's safety in both family/private and public settings. Two international conferences have been held to look at issues of women's safety in 2002 and 2004. These important milestones attest to the fact that the international community has acknowledged the necessity of 'Making the Links' (the theme of the first conference) in order to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of stakeholders including grassroots women. It is only by working comprehensively and in a multi-pronged and multi-sectoral fashion that we can begin to address the root causes of violence against women.

Given the existence of growing international attention on women's equality, it is an opportune time to launch the Third International Conference on Women's Safety, to take place in 2010. This event will occur two-thirds of the way to the 2015 deadline set for reaching the Millennium Development Goals. At this two-third marker, it is clear that we are a long way from achieving gender equality. Violence against women and women's sense of safety (or lack thereof) are still clear impediments to achieving equality and there is still much to be done to ensure that women can enjoy full citizenship and the right to the city.

## Safe cities for women are cities that are safe cities for everyone

Cities and urban conglomerations are increasingly becoming the dominant form of human settlement. It is estimated that 61% of the world's population will be urban by 2030 (UN-Habitat, 2007). Further, it is estimated that there will be at least 550 cities with populations of over one million by 2015. Already half of the world's population lives in urban environments. It is crucial that these spaces are made safe and inclusive of women in all their diversity. For this to happen, it is fundamental that women be included in all efforts to create both gender equality and quality urban environments. In order for women to participate in all aspects of urban development and decision-making, all stakeholders must recognize the systemic factors that allow gender inequality to continually manifest itself in cities – women's groups, municipalities, researchers, governments and international development agencies are all implicated in this task. Cities cannot be said to be inclusive until all women are fully represented in, and benefit equally from community development.

Women's lives are often structured differently from men's lives, in large part due to cultural and social patterns and expectations. Women are more vulnerable than men to sexual violence in public space and experience higher levels of insecurity. Thus, as beneficiaries of efforts to make safe and inclusive cities, women are best able to speak about their own experiences pertaining to safety in their city. Women's sensitivity and awareness of their neighbourhoods and communities, and the unsafe elements within these spaces, position them as 'experts of their own safety'. They are therefore in a unique position to research and propose city improvements that would make them feel safer and, consequently, be better able to exercise their right to participate in the city. By working towards the creation of cities in which all women feel safe, the city will naturally feel safer for everyone.

## Women as central actors in creating safe, inclusive cities

When it comes to urban safety, women need to be "at the heart of the action" in any strategies put forward. Tools such as the women's safety audit, which has been adapted and widely used in many regions around the world, recognize and capitalize on women's expertise. Cities have much to gain by encouraging women's participation and partnerships among local actors. Over the past 20 years, the development of international discussion networks has facilitated the transfer and adaptation of tools and methods of work (i.e., participation and capacity building by and for women and girls through community mobilization and local partnerships). Unfortunately, women's contributions to development and violence reduction often continue to go unrecognized and under-resourced. There is considerable recent experience in terms of data

collection, work on indicators and on the evaluation of participatory approaches, for example, which needs to be shared and debated. The needs of women living in slums and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, of elderly women, of disabled women, of indigenous women, and of those from ethnic and cultural minorities all continue to present particular challenges for women and their communities.

Women in Cities International and Jagori are co-organizing the Third International Conference on Women's Safety in order to address the needs of women and increase the networking among stakeholder working for safer and inclusive cities. The conference will take place in Delhi, India in November 2010. This Third International Conference of Women's Safety will build on the successes of its predecessors held in Montreal in 2002 (culminating in the Montreal Declaration on Women's Safety and the creation of Women in Cities International), and in Bogotá in 2004 (culminating in the Bogotá Declaration). Women will be at the centre of the conference, which will allow them to share experience and collectively develop ideas for confronting issues that threaten women's safety and equality in urban environments. The organization and presentation of the conference will be based on the recognition that working comprehensively and collectively in a multilevel and multi-sectoral fashion is the only way that we can begin to address the root causes of gender-based violence and inequality. The conference will bring together approximately 150 people from various fields who are actively involved in carrying out research and projects to enhance women's safety and equality in the world's cities. Participants will be invited on the basis of their contribution to the issues of gender equality and women's safety, and with the goal of ensuring equitable institutional and geographical distribution.

## Objectives

The objective of the Third International Women's Safety Conference is to consolidate discussions around safe and inclusive cities for women and girls and to facilitate exchange and cooperation among various partners working in the field of women's safety: women's groups, elected representatives and civil servants at the municipal level, associations of municipalities, researchers, crime prevention organizations, regional and national governments, community organizations, grassroots groups, and international agencies. The conference is a collaborative effort, being co-organized by Women in Cities International, based in Montreal, Canada, and Jagori, based in Delhi, India, and in collaboration with the Huairou Commission, UNIFEM, UN-Habitat, and various local and international partners.

One of the objectives of this conference will be to provide a forum for discussions and documentation on women's safety, in a way that builds on past knowledge and utilizes emerging technological tools. It is important to advance beyond simply linking ideas and actors. We must use these linkages to produce meaningful, lasting change in urban environments across the globe. In particular, we need to move from the recognition of the urban divide and the importance of gender-inclusive cities, to the creation and replication of cities where women's rights are paramount, where women's safety is important, and where gender equality and women's contributions to community and city development and safety are the norm.

The conference will provide the opportunity to ground methodologies that are aimed at making cities safer for women and girls. It will also explore how these methodologies have been or can be adapted, how they have succeeded, and how they can be improved and used elsewhere to confront new and emerging challenges threatening women's safety and equality in cities. In addition, the conference will be a forum to showcase innovation, evidenced-based practices and case studies.

Finally, recommendations from the conference will inform a global action plan on safe cities for women for the coming three years for local authorities, women's grassroots organizations, national governments, international organizations and other actors working towards safe and inclusive cities for women.

## Themes

Presentations will be conducted on the basis of key themes related to women's safety and equality in cities. These presentations will help us to review progress and take stock of where we are in terms of knowledge and practices, and will help to identify obstacles, strengths and future prospects. A number of themes on the issue of women's safety have been identified based on current practices and concerns being discussed by local and international networks.

The following themes reflect diverse approaches and strategies that build women's and communities' capacities for action. The power of citizen empowerment and participation in enhancing safety in public spaces will be at the heart of all conference events. Partnership issues, the role that local authorities can play, local-level action and the sharing of local and international expertise and practice will be overarching concerns to be addressed throughout conference themes.

Specific conference themes might include:

- Involving differently-abled women in the safe cities for women movement
- Strengthening our links and linking globally
- Moving towards inclusive cities
- Women in megacities
- Creative expressions of (un)safe and in/exclusive urban spaces
- Women's access to basic services
- Good governance

## Activities

Different events will feature different presentations and discussion formats. One keynote presentation will be organized per day, featuring a renowned expert to speak about an innovative idea or practice. Plenary sessions will be organized around conference sub-themes. During these sessions, three experts will be given the floor to present their ideas and projects with the support of a chair and rapporteur. Furthermore, concurrent workshops/roundtables will be organized at which three panelists will explore each sub-theme in greater detail - these will also be supported by a chair and rapporteur.

In addition to the daily conference programme, activities aimed at facilitating networking and partnership building will be arranged:

- A cocktail reception will be organized on the first evening of the conference to facilitate networking;
- A dinner will be organized for all panelists, organizers, and participants;
- Select site visits will be organized to allow participants to see first-hand some of the work being done in and around Delhi, India on women's safety and gender equality.
- An exhibition space for display of innovative and creative expressions of women's experiences and perceptions of cities

## Outputs

A webpage dedicated to the conference will be developed and made available via the conference organizers' websites. The webpage will contain up-to date information about the conference, encourage discussion and debate before and after the conference and will allow participants to register electronically.

A background paper will be developed in anticipation of the conference. The background paper will serve to inform all conference participants about pertinent information related to women's safety and equality in cities, and will be centered on the conference themes.

A 'Delhi Declaration' will be presented and adopted at the end of the conference, following the tradition of its predecessors. Conclusions from each of the sessions will inform said declaration.

Following the conference, the organizers will pull together all pertinent resulting information and this package will be made available electronically and in print as official conference proceedings. Proceedings will include: an introduction summarizing the conference and its themes, the Delhi Declaration adopted at the close of the conference, short papers prepared by the keynote speakers, panelists' presentations, and the rapporteurs' conclusions from each of the sessions.

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