

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **COMBATING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE MUST REMAIN A PRIORITY DESPITE GLOBAL DOWNTURN**

It is crucial that international development programmes, which promote gender equality and reduce the instances of gender based violence, are prioritised even in the face of global recession. That's according to Mary Robinson, who today (06.11.09) launched "*Keeping Gender on the Agenda – Gender Based Violence, Poverty and Development*", a publication of the Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence.

Since 2005, a consortium of 16 organisations\* – comprising human rights, humanitarian and development organisations, together with Irish Aid (the Government's Overseas Aid Programme at the Department of Foreign Affairs) and the Defence Forces - has been working to tackle gender based violence in its development and human rights work. Mrs Robinson acts as a special advisor to the consortium.

According to Mrs Robinson: "The global recession may expose more women in the developing world to the risk of gender based violence, as household incomes shrink and programmes to combat gender inequality are compromised. Failing to address Gender Based Violence and gender equality can have significant economic and social costs which undermine international development efforts. Increased levels of gender based violence could have far-reaching consequences, including higher levels of malnutrition among children, increased levels of HIV and AIDS and reduced participation of women in economic development.

"Investing in the prevention of gender based violence and incorporating responses to it in national development plans and poverty reduction strategies will have long term benefits for individuals and societies. Leadership and continued action is essential to ensure continued investment and scale up of effective responses to gender based violence," she said.

The paper, written by Dr Nata Duvvry of NUI Galway, launched by Mrs Robinson examines the cost of gender based violence and shows how failure to address it will impact on the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. For instance, the paper cites a study of women in antenatal clinics in South Africa which found that women reporting violence were 50 per cent more likely to be HIV positive. This undermines the Millennium Goal which centres on combating HIV and AIDS.

"Gender based violence inhibits successful development: it affects productivity, health and the wellbeing of women and children. Unless we address gender based violence in our international policy, the Millennium Development Goals will not be achieved," said Mary Robinson.

Also speaking at today's event was, Minister for European Affairs, Dick Roche TD; Finola Finnan, Trócaire's Programme Leader HIV and Gender Equality, who acts as Chairperson of the Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence, and Dr Nata Duvvry, Co Director of the Global Women's Studies programme at NUI Galway .

In his address at today's event Minister Dick Roche TD, Minister for European Affairs, also stressed the importance of continuing the Joint Consortium's important work in addressing - what he described as 'the scandal' - of gender based violence. Minister Roche said: "we are very conscious that focusing on gender equality, and such violence as a key manifestation of gender inequality, significantly strengthens the impact of our development efforts. We must maintain our commitment to this critical development and human rights issue."

According to the Chairperson of the Joint Consortium, Finola Finnan , the members of the Consortium remain committed to keeping gender based violence at the heart of their work despite the downturn: "NGOs in Ireland have been greatly affected by the downturn. This, in turn, has impacted on the scale and reach of our development, advocacy and humanitarian programmes. However, after five years of making gender based violence a core focus of our work, we realise the critical importance of maintaining this focus, despite diminishing resources.

"Consortium members continue to be involved in programmes that address and respond to gender based violence, in a number of developing countries. Irish aid agencies, as well as Irish Aid - the Government's Overseas Aid Programme at the Department of Foreign Affairs - are actively engaged in partnership projects in many countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America where levels of gender based violence are worryingly high.

Dr Nata Duvvury, Co-Director of the Global Women's Studies programme at NUI Galway said: "Our knowledge of what works in addressing gender based violence has expanded enormously. There are successful examples of responses to address gender based violence that need to be scaled-up and replicated widely. Particularly important is the replication of interventions engaging men and boys who play a key role in the reduction and, ultimately, elimination of gender based violence."

**ENDS.**

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*\*The Joint Consortium on Gender Based Violence includes: Action Aid Ireland, Amnesty International, Childfund Ireland, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Defence Forces, Dtalk, GOAL, Irish Aid (Government's Overseas Aid Programme at the Department of Foreign Affairs), Irish Red Cross, KODE (Kimmage Open and Distance Education), Oxfam Ireland, Plan Ireland, Self Help Africa, Trócaire and World Vision.*