President Uhuru Kenyatta launches the HeforShe campaign for Kenya

President Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta launched on 26 November, 2014, both the HeforShe Campaign and the 16 Days of Activism to end Gender-Based Violence (GBV). President Kenyatta is the second Head of State in Africa after President Paul Kagame of Rwanda to formally commit and assume the role of a Champion for UN Women’s groundbreaking campaign, HeforShe.

In the wake of public outcry against a series of recent assaults against women and girls in Kenya, such as the incidents that occurred in Nairobi and Mombasa where women were stripped naked in public spaces because of their dress orientations, filmed and posted on social media, or the shocking news of a three-year old girl who was raped by her two uncles; and on the tail of recent African leaders re-adopting the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) which calls for governments to provide adequate space and resources for the implementation of gender equality, the President made a firm and powerful commitment to end the violence and truly stand as an ally to women in Kenya.

“We are launching an amazing campaign #HeforShe today. All our efforts are meaningless unless YOU and ME take responsibility,” stressed the President while calling on all Kenyans, men and women, to stand for gender equality.


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have a responsibility to safeguard the rights of women as we are all equal,” he added.

The First Lady, Mrs. Margaret Kenyatta, accompanied the President to the launch, where Members of Parliament also joined the colorful event, attended by more than 5,000 people from all walks of life.

While addressing the increased cases of physical assaults against women in Nairobi and Mombasa Counties, the Cabinet Secretary for Devolution and Planning, Ms. Ann Waiguru, emphasized: “We must stand with our girls and women, we should live in a peaceful society where human rights are observed but it has to come from you, let us all work together to ensure there is gender equality and no violence in our nation… I urge our men and boys to stand for gender equality as it is not just a woman’s issue”.

The UN Resident Coordinator in Kenya, Ms. Nardos Bekele-Thomas agreed: “… Indeed, this Campaign is timely against the backdrop of the recent increased cases of sexual assault against girls and women in public spaces in Nairobi. Gender-Based Violence reflects and reinforces inequalities between men and women, compromising not only the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims but exerting a heavy economic toll on the country”.

Ms. Bekele-Thomas reiterated the UN’s commitment to support the Kenyan Government’s policies and programmes on gender equality, building on the existing partnership and looking forward to more actions to implement the policies in place. “On our part as the United Nations, we want to assure the Government and the people of Kenya of our continued and steadfast support towards promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment.”

A number of local artists performed at the launch. The famous Kenya male group, Sauti Sol made a public apology if at all the group might have previously abused women through their music. They announced that they were standing up for gender equality and would champion the HeforShe campaign with messages through their music across East Africa.

The young and talented poet, Ken Kibet, AKA Mufasa from the group PAWA254/Art Rising performed two touching poems: “Letter to My Unborn Daughter” and “Son of a Woman” which moved the whole crowd and the President. The two poems expressed mainly the young man’s view of the role of a man towards gender equality and the empowerment of women. Mustafa will champion the HeforShe campaign through his poetry. Please make a commitment to the HeforShe campaign at: www.heforshe.org Twitter: #heforshe; #heforsheKE

There are voices from the field of survivors, reformed perpetrators, duty bearers/service providers and other individuals or groups that have experienced gender-based violence (GBV), directly or indirectly. The mapped counties are: Nairobi, Mombasa, Bungoma, Kisii, Kisumu and Nyeri. These counties have been selected due to the high prevalence of GBV and in some instances, due to the fact that specific forms of GBV are more prevalent.
NYERI

Violet Atoko – Nurse in charge of GBVRC
“There is visible transformation in our health care system as we can now see positive change in most hospitals. Gender-Based Violence Recovery Centres (GBVRC) are separate sections in hospitals that specifically deal with sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases. These specialized facilities make it easier for people to come and get expert medical attention.”

Zipporah Gatimu – Social Worker
“There should be a one stop shop to handle cases of GBV so that survivors are not subjected to further pain as is the case presently. Examination, treatment, counseling and police services can be in one station. It is a tiresome process to go through police and hospitals, so some survivors opt not to pursue legal recourse.”

MOMBASA

Abdalla Abdulrahman – Community Policing Chairman, Kisimani
“Many cases of GBV in Mombasa are due to the problem of alcohol and drug abuse. If we tackle this issue then I believe GBV cases will also reduce. Civic education is needed to sensitize the community, and the Government also has to step in to play its role in enforcing the rule of law.”

Elizabeth Mkongo – Chairlady Sauti ya Kina Mama, Kisauni
“I work as a volunteer and activist for the rights of women and children who are the most vulnerable to GBV. There is still a lot to be done to reduce the cases which are on the rise. Most people still don’t know what to do when faced with GBV and most women and children often fear going through the police and courts.”

BUNGOMA

Geoffrey Musoko - District Children Officer, Mt. Elgon
“Violence against children is prevalent in the area and includes female genital mutilation, defilement and early/child marriages. Nonetheless, the County Government of Bungoma has put in place measures to prevent and respond to the same. We have increased the number of children officers from only 3 to 7 at the sub-county level, we are enforcing the Children’s Act and the cash transfer programme for the most vulnerable children has been rolled out.”

Norah Nakami- Mother of child survivor, Mt Elgon
“I am a single parent with five children. I had gone to the shamba (garden) to pick some vegetables only to return and find my five-year old girl crying and bleeding. She had been raped by our 36 year-old neighbour. I took her to Cheptais hospital only to be referred to Eldoret hospital as she had developed complications and fistula. The man was arrested but was later released on bond.”

KISUMU

Benta Bella, Paralegal
“Women with disabilities are often left out of the conversation when it comes to GBV yet we are one of the most vulnerable groups. They face challenges with regard to realizing their land and property rights and are often survivors of domestic, emotional and physical violence. I call upon the relevant stakeholders to develop a policy on prevention and response to SGBV specifically for persons with disabilities.”
Inspector Yustine Kathambi, Central Police Station
“The police reforms have resulted in significant gains in the prevention and response to GBV. Senior officers are very understanding and in many instances have been trained on GBV. This means that the concept of gender desks and units in each police station is increasingly being implemented. Moreover, for those of us on the ground, coordination mechanisms such as court-user-committees, have significantly improved the response and management of GBV.”

KISII

Edward Obuba, Community Health Worker- Gucha District Hospital
“Working on GBV prevention and response is a challenge especially in communities where cultural norms are patriarchal. Some of the structures at community level provide havens for known perpetrators of GBV. Mechanisms should be put in place for whistleblowers and community workers who are working on GBV cases especially where perpetrators are influential.”

Rose Kembo (protected identity), Mother of Defiled Child
“My message to all parents is that they should not give up the fight. They should not give in to pressure, especially from influential people, to settle gender-based violence using informal methods. I call upon duty bearers to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.”

We cannot abandon Kenya’s Mandera County as medics flee Islamist attacks by Siddharth Chatterjee

On 2 December, Islamic militants attacked a quarry near Mandera town and executed 36 innocent workers, just days after the hijacking of a Nairobi-bound bus outside the town and the killing of 28 passengers.

As a result of the insecurity, public servants -- especially teachers and doctors, who suffered the brunt of the bus attack -- are leaving Mandera.

The Mandera Referral Hospital -- in one of the most dangerous places in the world for a woman to give birth -- is now facing severe staff shortages. The women’s ward had to be shut down after nearly 40 nursing staff fled Mandera in fear for their lives.

Mandera has a maternal mortality rate (MMR) of 3,795 deaths per 100,000 live births, more than double that of neighbouring Wajir, Kenya’s second most dangerous place to give birth, with an MMR of 1,683.

This county needs doctors, teachers and other public servants more than any other. If more of these professionals leave Mandera, the people will suffer, especially women and girls.

Maternal mortality rates in Mandera are worse than that of war-torn Sierra Leone in 2005, with an MMR of 2,100, and Somalia, estimated at 1,200.

So why is the situation so bad in Mandera? Its remoteness combined with inequity and persistent instability are causes that are apparent.

But there are underlying causes too. The ordeal women and girls in Mandera face is appalling and unacceptable. For example:

a. Most are denied the right to an education.

b. They are forced to undergo the worst form of female genital mutilation at a very young age.
c. They are married off well before they attain the age of 18 and become mothers before their bodies are physically ready.

Is it any wonder then, that maternal-related disabilities and infant and maternal mortality rates in this county are alarmingly high?

What can the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and all development partners who provide health and education services to people in need, do to change this? Do we not have a humanitarian and moral imperative to scale up our efforts in Mandera?

We cannot abandon Mandera because of insecurity and logistical challenges.

Mandera County Governor Ali Roba is leading from the front to improve the situation for women and girls in Mandera. Over the last 18 months, the hospital has been refurbished from its formerly dilapidated state. It has emerged from the ashes into a very good hospital facility through the concerted efforts of the county authorities.

In August 2014, Governor Roba promised to reduce the maternal death rate in Mandera by signing a communiqué along with 14 other governors whose 15 counties together account for nearly 99 percent of maternal deaths in Kenya.

UNFPA helped bring together a diverse and committed group of humanitarian and development partners, as well as the private sector, to visit Mandera to discuss ways of improving the dire maternal health situation. These included the Kenya Red Cross Society, the World Bank, the technology company Phillips, the Aga Khan University and the African Medical and Research Foundation.

Despite early morning news coming in of the attack, the United Nations decided to press ahead with its mission to Mandera in an expression of solidarity and support for its people.

Two courageous women led the mission: Ruth Kagia, a senior adviser to Kenya’s President, and the United Nations Resident Coordinator for Kenya, Nardos Bekele-Thomas.

“The government of Kenya is committed to safeguard and ensure the security of Mandera,” Kagia said. “Humanitarian and development assistance must go hand in hand with security support.”

While the incidents that happened in Mandera are heartbreaking, we must work to defeat terror through development, resolving inequity, ensuring basic services and human rights for all.

We must win this war, and it can only be done by intensifying efforts to guarantee security in the region; to escalate access to healthcare and education; to build and improve infrastructure in the county; and to protect the rights of all the individuals, especially women and girls, by eradicating the harmful practices and traditions that place them at risk of disability and death.

Governor Roba can count on the United Nations family and all local and international partners to help end the scourge of maternal deaths in Mandera.

Siddharth Chatterjee is the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Representative to Kenya. Follow him on twitter: @sidchat1

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**UN in Kenya gathers for the inaugural DaO Town Hall meeting**

The United Nations Kenya Country Team held a Town Hall meeting, on 11 November 2014, on Delivering as One (DaO). The meeting organized by the United Nations Communication Group (UNCG), was chaired by the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Nardos Bekele-Thomas.

The Town Hall meeting was designed to be an informational session, one of a number to come, so staff can comprehend what DaO means and eventually become its energetic advocates. DaO is the spirit of cooperation between various agencies of the United Nations, the government and the civil society in achieving common goals.

The Resident Coordinator, Ms. Bekele-Thomas reiterated that the UN in
Kenya would also like to start working towards studying root causes of various problems so that the Organization does not only come in during a crisis.

Ms. Bekele-Thomas outlined the four Strategic Areas of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in Kenya: Transformational Governance; Human Capital Development; Inclusive and Sustainable Growth; and Environmental Sustainability, Land Management and Human Security.

In her presentation as the lead agency in Human Capital Development, the UNICEF Acting Representative, Ms. Pirkko Heinonen, challenged all UN staff to read the UNDAF document so they understand the goals that the UN in World AIDS Day 2014 saw Kenya reflect on the past three decades of the HIV epidemic. The response to the pandemic has taught the world invaluable lessons and exposed two extreme sides of humanity.

Kenya has made commendable strides in the response; the country has witnessed a 44% reduction of new HIV infections among children in only five years, mainly due to the introduction of prevention of vertical transmission. There are more than 600,000 people living with HIV accessing life-saving treatment and there was a seven-fold increase in HIV testing in the last few years. The establishment of the first HIV Equity Tribunal is another commendable milestone made by the country.

Despite all this marked progress, the World Health Organization (WHO) ranks Kenya fourth in terms of the HIV burden. In efforts to bring this epidemic to a halt, the National AIDS Control Council, UNAIDS and national partners put together a month-long exhibition to display the journey of the epidemic. The HIV @ 30 Exhibition dubbed ‘From Despair to Hope’ opened on 21 November and runs till 21 December, 2014 at the National Museums of Kenya.

On World AIDS Day, 1 December,
In the lifetime of the HIV epidemic, we have seen how one virus can change the course of history. Incredible transformation and deep entrenchment—HIV has brought out the best and worst of humanity,” says UNAIDS Executive Director, Michel Sidibe.
The speakers (from L to R) Sahle-Work Zewde, UNON Director-General, Ibrahim Thiaw, UNEP Deputy Executive Director and UNIC-Nairobi Director Nasser Ega-Musa. (Photo by UNIC)

The UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Representative Nardos Bekele-Thomas, (centre) briefs the faculty members and course participants with UNON Director-General Sahle-Work Zewde and UNIC-Nairobi Director Nasser Ega-Musa. (Photo by UNIC)

The UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative Nardos Bekele-Thomas spoke to the group on the role of UN agencies in Kenya. UNEP’s Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director Ibrahim Thiaw presented a link between natural resources and conflicts and highlighted UNEP’s country operations in conflicts and disaster affected countries.

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Habitat, which include urban legislation, land, and governance, risk reduction and rehabilitation, and research and capacity development. The briefings were moderated by UNIC-Nairobi Director Nasser Ega-Musa.

Thereafter the visitors were taken for a guided tour of the complex which included stops at several gifts donated by Member States, a visit to the major conference rooms, the VIP tree-planting area, a walk-through the offices of UNEP and UN-Habitat, commonly referred to as “NOF” and the Memorial Garden with its “Peace Pole.” The tours were provided by Public Information Assistants Rebecca Gakonyo and Jue Wang.

Following the tour, Ambassador Peter Ogego from the College expressed appreciation to the Service for organizing the visit. He said: “Our visit was rewarding, memorable and educative. We look forward to continued cooperation between our two institutions”. He also added that the tour was a success and their desired objectives were met.

Following a General Assembly’s resolution, the Visitors’ Service was established in January 2012 to open-up the UN complex in Nairobi to the public through guided tours and to serve as a link between visitors and the Organization.

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