



**World Health  
Organization**

Western Pacific

# Partnership, protection, response and empowerment: rolling out essential services to end gender-based violence against women and girls in Asia and the Pacific

## Joint news release by UNFPA, UN Women and WHO

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WHO/Y. Shimizu

Governments, civil society and the United Nations family in Asia and the Pacific are strengthening efforts to respond to the persistent scourge of gender-based violence against women and girls in the region, with the roll-out of an essential services package that incorporates prevention and response underpinned by strategic partnerships, impactful laws and policies, and justice and healing for survivors.

One hundred participants from governments and civil society organizations representing 10 countries gathered in Bangkok this week at a three-day meeting organized by regional offices of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Western Pacific.

Gender-based violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a pervasive human rights violation and public health concern. Globally one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner. In the Asia-Pacific region, up to two-thirds of women in some countries have experienced violence in their lifetime.

Acknowledging the enormous toll gender-based violence takes on countries and societies, many governments are increasing their commitment to promote gender equality, prevent VAWG and support survivors of violence.

This commitment is reflected as well via key targets under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that seek to fulfill the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda whose central pledge is to leave no one behind.

“The SDGs at heart are about building more caring, equal and democratic societies,” noted Yoriko Yasukawa, UNFPA Regional Director for Asia-Pacific. “Ensuring that all women and girls are treated with dignity and respect needs to form the foundation of that endeavour.”

It is also reflected in global health agendas, including the WHO global plan of action on strengthening the role of health systems in addressing violence against women and girls and children, which the 193 Member States endorsed at the World Health Assembly in May 2016.

“The health system is a key entry point to identify women and girls who have experienced violence and provide them with comprehensive health services, including sexual and reproductive health,” noted Avni Amin, Technical Officer, WHO.

Establishing and strengthening essential services to respond to gender-based violence is vital for women and girls seeking help, support and justice. These essential services need to bring together key sectors, including the police, the legal system, social services and health.

To improve the quality of and access to this support, a Joint UN Programme on Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence has been established this year with the participation of UNFPA, UN Women, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and WHO.

“This programme seeks to fill the gap between the agreements made at the international level for responding to violence against women and girls and the actual work done at the country level on how to develop and implement quality services and responses,” explained Miwa Kato, Regional Director, UN Women Asia-Pacific. “We need to ensure that theory is actually translated into practice, to protect, benefit and ultimately empower millions of women and girls across our region.”

These guidelines and tools will be piloted in up to 10 low- to middle-income countries from 2016 to 2018. In the Asia-Pacific region, the pilot countries already selected are Cambodia, Kiribati and Solomon Islands.

“The Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence is remarkable because for the first time, we are establishing the quality and type of minimal responses that survivors of violence should expect, anywhere. This package of services draws its strength by connecting services and expectations across health, policing, social welfare, justice- as well as the systems of coordination among them. There is power in holistic, coordinated responses- power to change lives for the better and bring about justice,” emphasized Melissa Alvarado, Ending Violence against Women Specialist, UN Women Asia-Pacific.

“Already these and other Member States in the Western Pacific Region have made remarkable progress in the health sector response to violence against women based on the WHO guidelines, providing an opportunity to further strengthen a multi-sector response,” noted Britta Baer, Technical Officer, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific.

## A unique gathering

This week’s Bangkok meeting brought together government representatives, service providers and civil society entities from 10 countries: Cambodia, China, Fiji, Kiribati, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands and Viet Nam.

“This was a truly unique opportunity for all the participants,” said Sujata Tuladhar, Technical Specialist, Violence Against Women, UNFPA Asia-Pacific. “Some countries have already been taking significant steps to address violence against women, others are just beginning to. It was

gratifying to see the participants exchange experiences and lessons learnt, to become better acquainted with the essential services package, and to identify next steps for strengthening multisectoral and integrated services at country level with UN support.”