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Ending Violence against Women and Girls: From Solidarity to Justice, From Impunity to Accountability

When acts of violence are committed against girls and women, they threaten to rob life. Whether sexual or non-sexual, the consequences extend far beyond physical injuries. The physical and psychological harm, with its enduring impact on health, education, economic opportunities, relationships and well-being, constitutes a life-robbing trauma.

This trauma robs not only the girl or woman next door. It robs her circle of friends, her family, her community, the school she attends, the place where she works and where she leads. It diminishes our collective humanity and deprives society of her gifts, potential and contributions.

Preventing violence against women and girls is, therefore, about protecting human dignity, upholding fundamental human rights, safeguarding peace and investing in the sacredness of life. Created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), every girl and woman has the inherent right to live in dignity, safety and freedom, to realise her God-given potential and experience life in all its fullness. Violence that violates this dignity contradicts God's intention for life.

Despite ongoing efforts, the findings remain deeply disturbing. Almost one in three adolescent girls aged 15–19 years, approximately 43 million worldwide, have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, in their lifetime. Behind these statistics are real lives, wounded spirits, interrupted dreams and futures threatened.

Every year, from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence call for global solidarity. This year, the UNiTE campaign calls on the world to “Ensure justice, protect survivors, end impunity.” For girls and women, this call is particularly urgent.

Let this year's observance be an urgent reminder, but let our commitment and actions extend far beyond these 16 days.

Violence against women and girls is preventable. Collective action, political will, adequate financing, effective legislation, strong institutional systems and sustained community engagement can bring lasting change. Governments must be held accountable for protecting human rights, ensuring access to justice and dismantling systems that perpetuate violence and enable impunity. Prevention must be accompanied by safe, accessible and survivor-centred care.

The Council for World Mission (CWM) calls on its member churches and partners to advance the cultural, theological, legislative, political and social transformations necessary to end violence against women and girls. We must courageously confront harmful cultural norms, challenge theological interpretations that legitimise gender inequality and violence, dismantle oppressive power structures and advocate for laws and practices that uphold human dignity.

Our churches must be known as communities of refuge, healing, justice and prophetic witness, where survivors are heard, believed, supported and never silenced, and perpetrators are held accountable.

We cannot proclaim the Gospel of life while remaining silent in the face of that which robs life, nor be faithful to God's call for justice while tolerating conditions that perpetuate violence.

Protecting the sacredness of life, defending human dignity and working towards a world where every girl and woman can live, thrive and lead without fear is not optional. It is our theological imperative, our moral responsibility and our missional call, Not an Optional Concern.

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