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Montenegrians can help prevent violence against women by learning from international experiences



Not so long ago violence against women was considered a cultural norm. UNDP's Regional Gender Practice Leader Ms Koh Miyaoi remembers, "About 20 years ago a Japanese diplomat was arrested in a foreign country where he was posted, for beating his wife. And he made a statement to the effect of, 'What's the big deal? This is how we are. This is how we do things in Japan.'"

That is not how they do things in Japan anymore. Ms Miyaoi says that Japan has curbed, but not completely

eliminated, violence against women. "No longer does the average Japanese man think that it is acceptable to inflict violence upon women."

The Japanese tackled the problem in many ways, some very similar to UNDP Montenegro's annual *16 Days against Family Violence Campaign*, which runs this year between November 25 and December 10.

Acknowledging that it is ready and willing to address the problem of violence against women, the Government of Montenegro is in the process of drafting and adopting a Law on Family Violence Prevention. UNDP has been and will continue to be instrumental in aiding the government in this effort.

Ms Miyaoi says that legislation against violence against women is vitally important but it is equally important to get the message across to the public that it is not acceptable for men to resort to violence when they get angry. In order to get that message across, loud and clear, UNDP Montenegro is working in concert with the Government of Montenegro, many national and international organizations.

As part of the *16 Days against Family Violence Campaign*, Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic, President Filip Vujanovic and Speaker of the Parliament Ranko Krivokapic all demonstrated their dedication to the goals of the campaign by hosting events that brought together representatives from numerous international and national organizations, the judiciary and the police, all of whom will play vital roles in preventing violence against Montenegrin women.

The media also play a vital role in changing the traditionally accepted but no longer acceptable behaviour of violent men. Ms Miyaoi remembers, "When I was still living in Japan, in the 70s and 80s, there was not much coverage of family violence in the media. That changed when Japanese women started to attend international conferences about what other

countries were doing to end violence against women. When they returned from such conferences they were better equipped to command media attention because they could explain what was going on in the world outside Japan.” Such efforts helped change not only the laws related to violence but also the attitudes of Japanese society.

Even if children are not violently abused in the home, violence against their mothers hurts them. One of the most compelling aspects of the campaign is an exhibition of drawing and paintings produced by children depicting violence in the home. Ms Miyaoi had an opportunity to see the exhibition and says that children painted a very clear picture of the reality of the problem, “Almost every picture depicts a man hitting a woman. In the pictures the children depict themselves as either hiding in the corner, or opposing the man, trying to stop him, or hugging the woman.”

The drawings and paintings will be exhibited in the Hall of Parliament on December 8, affording Montenegro’s elected officials an opportunity to see inside the minds of the country’s children and better understand what is going on behind closed doors all across Montenegro.

Ms Miyaoi is quick to point out that violence against women is very much a problem that is hidden. “Men will fight each other and in public but they rarely hit a women unless it is behind closed doors, usually in the family home, where no one can see them. Violence against women at home also happens without actual physical harm, for example, as intimidation or abusive words. In patriarchal societies men consider women their private property. In such societies the home belongs to the man and those men behave as if the state cannot interfere with what happens there.” But by making violence against women a serious criminal offense and by enforcing the law, men will come to understand that they can no more expect the police to turn a blind eye to them hitting women inside the family home than they would to dealing drugs or committing other serious offences inside the home.

It is women who can help end violence against women and bring about a change in Montenegro, says Ms Miyaoi. The women who are victims of violent men should know that they can take actions to end their horrible plight. “Everywhere in the world women are sitting at home thinking ‘I deserved this because I behaved badly’. Women need to know that they have the right to report violence,” says Ms Miyaoi. She is certain that this year’s Campaign will help increase awareness amongst both men and women in Montenegro that violence against women is simply not acceptable.