



## **Seven governments adopt statement on violence against women and girls at 66th World Health Assembly**

[Geneva, CH ~ May 21, 2013] – In the context of the annual gathering of the world's ministers of health, seven governments – Belgium, India, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, United States of America, and Zambia – issued a statement at the conclusion of a panel discussion declaring violence against women and girls "a major global public health, gender equality and human rights challenge, touching every country and every part of society" and proposing an agenda item on the topic for the 67th World Health Assembly.

The statement which was read by Ms Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services of the United States, recognizes WHO's work to date in preventing violence against women as fundamental in highlighting the magnitude of and outlining the factors associated with this global scourge. It notes that the health sector has a key role to play in preventing and responding to the problem, as part of a robust multi-sectoral approach that engages governments and civil society, on the local, national and international level. The statement also recognizes WHO's leadership in ensuring that the public health approach to violence prevention more broadly is widely understood and being acted on by an increasing numbers of countries.

The lively panel discussion on "Addressing violence against women: health impacts and the role of the health sector" featured the African Union's Commissioner for Social Affairs; Ministers of Health or their representatives from Belgium, India, Mexico, the United States and Zambia; and the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development from the Netherlands. Panellists highlighted how violence against women is being addressed in several countries.

India's Secretary of Health and Family Welfare Desiraju described how his government has broadened the definition of rape to criminalize a greater set of violations and better protect women, while Zambia's Minister Kasonde identified leadership - of Zambia's first lady, the country's traditional chiefs, the police and others – as key to making progress on preventing violence against women in his country. The Netherland's Minister Ploumen called women powerful agents of peace and security, and noted the importance of empowering women as a vital component of the country's development cooperation strategy.

Secretary Sebelius pointed out the decline in intimate partner violence in the United States by two thirds from 1993 to 2010. She attributed this progress to a change in culture, attitude and norms, derived from enhanced gender equality, a better criminal justice response, improved services for victims and more effective prevention. Like Secretary Sebelius, ministers from Belgium, the Netherlands and Mexico and the commissioner from the African Union noted the importance of being able to talk about violence against women and girls, in terms of bringing the discourse out of the private sphere behind closed doors and into the public domain.

WHO commended the efforts described by panelists, recognizing that more work needs to be done in advocacy, data collection, policy, services and addressing the root causes of violence to enable prevention. WHO welcomed the statement which notes that this event marks the beginning of a process to address this issue with renewed vigor, calls for improved coordination across all UN agencies, and proposes a discussion on the topic for the 67th World Health Assembly.