

**Message from Ms. Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women**

**ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) in cooperation  
with UN Women**

**Seminar: Towards Achieving Substantive Gender Equality  
5-6 September 2011, Jakarta, Indonesia**

Dear friends,

I wish I were there with you in person and I want to assure you that I am with you in spirit. I want to congratulate the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights for convening this Seminar on Gender Equality together with UN Women. We are proud to be your partner.

Since the signing of our ASEAN-UN Women Framework for Cooperation in 2006, we have worked together to promote and implement the 1988 ASEAN Declaration of the Advancement of Women, and the 2004 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.



We strive to achieve the gender equality goals of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals that ASEAN Member States have all subscribed to.

I applaud the establishment of the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children. And I look forward to the ASEAN Declaration on Human Rights that you are currently drafting and the benefits it will bring to the people of this region, particularly to women and girls.

In addition to guaranteeing non-discrimination and equality, it is our hope that the Declaration will acknowledge the systemic and entrenched discrimination that women continue to face, and address the barriers that persist so that women can realize their human rights in the region.

Now there's no question that discrimination and violence against women is deeply entrenched in social norms and practices. Studies in the region point to widespread public acceptance of violence against women. Half of survey respondents in Malaysia and nearly two-thirds in Thailand and Viet Nam said that it is sometimes or always acceptable for a man to beat his wife.

So clearly there is much work to be done.

The good news is that 8 out of 10 ASEAN Member States have laws to prohibit domestic violence, and 7 of these explicitly criminalize marital rape. And some countries have introduced one-stop crisis centres that bring together police, forensic and health care services under one roof, to reduce the number of steps that a woman has to take to seek justice. In others, special court rooms have been introduced that are sensitive to the needs of victims of domestic violence.

However, as we all know, women are often denied access to justice. In a study conducted by UNDP and the Government of Indonesia, only 38 percent of respondents said that courts were located within an accessible distance of their homes.

In other cases, justice is not affordable to women, who must pay for legal advice and even for vital forensic evidence. A 2007 study by the Cambodian Ministry of Justice found that fees for forensic examinations – often crucial in rape cases – cost between \$5 and \$14, about two weeks' average income in rural areas.

The work we do together will help set standards and give people the tools they want to pursue their own dreams and make the most of their potential. UN Women is committed to this mission. We hope that seminars, such as this one, may become a regular feature of our cooperation in promoting and protecting human rights for all.

Together let us make gender equality an integral part of the ASEAN vision of “**One Caring and Sharing Community with One Vision and One Identity**”.

Thank you all very much.