

Safe Cities for Women Project in Guatemala City and San Salvador

Script for PowerPoint Updated January 2011

Slide 1

Whether on city streets, public transportation or in their own neighborhoods, women and girls are subjected to various types of violence and abuse — from sexual harassment, both physical and verbal, to sexual assault and rape.

Such daily occurrences limit the rights and freedoms of women as equal citizens to enjoy their neighbourhoods and cities, and to exercise their rights to mobility, education, work, recreation, collective organization and participation in political life.

Despite affecting countless millions of women, with often disruptive and devastating consequences, this phenomenon has long been tolerated as a regular facet of city life. Whereas gender-based violence in the private domain is now widely recognized as a human rights violation, violence against women in public spaces remains a largely neglected issue, with few laws or policies in place to address it.

The focus of the *Safe Cities for Women Project in Guatemala City and San Salvador* is on urban security as a gender issue. This is because women in cities are increasingly vulnerable to gender-based violence in situations exacerbated by social violence. In order to prevent and address violence against women in urban spaces, the project will work in close coordination with women's organizations, networks, local governments to develop and implement public policies on urban settings that include women's issues and views. It will implement a participatory model that builds the capacity of local women's organizations to form coalitions, identify risk in their communities, advocate for their right to lives and neighborhoods free from violence and fear and to participate in the planning of safe neighborhoods with local authorities.

Slide 2

The situation in Guatemala and El Salvador has drawn the attention of agencies of the United Nations, governments, civil society organizations, networks of women's organizations and human rights advocates, who consider these alarming rates of violence against women a pressing emergency. They call for immediate action to prevent and combat violence against women in the turbulent urban areas of these countries.

In response, the UNIFEM *Safe Cities for Women* program provides a means for women to achieve changes in public policies and urban planning that meet the particular needs of women in an urban environment and, as a result, reduce public and private violence against them.

Urban violence in Latin America is an increasing phenomenon with a murder rate 114% higher than the world average.

Urban violence in Guatemala and El Salvador has rates of violent homicides even above the regional average.

As these nations urbanize, there is a growing sense of insecurity among the population – especially among women, who are particularly vulnerable to violence in private and public spaces.

Slide 3

Recently ended civil wars have contributed to a culture of violence to resolve conflict and disputes – more than 3,200 Guatemalan women have been kidnapped, murdered, raped and tortured in the past 7 years and 1,000 women in El Salvador have experienced the same fate.

Repatriation of gang members and criminals following the civil wars resulted in an increase in drug trafficking and violent gangs...and a threat to the safety of women.

Worsening economic conditions forced young women to relocate to cities to seeking work. This caused them to live in densely populated and dangerous slums. The subordinate position of women in society also makes women more vulnerable.

Slide 4

Since 1923, Zonta has provided more than \$9.8 million to projects benefiting more than 2 million women in 34 countries. UNIFEM, with \$600,000 of financial support from Zonta International, is addressing this situation. The goal is to strengthen women's right to active citizenship and to reduce public and private violence, especially urban violence.

Slide 5

Public outreach and campaigns will be conducted through the web and media, to strengthen women's security and human rights.

Slide 6

The project will be implemented in the poorest neighborhoods of these capital cities. This includes some 600 families in city, each or a total population of approximately 3000 to 3500. Women and NGOs in the inner cities and surrounding areas will directly benefit from the projects, and entire neighborhoods of women, men and their families will benefit from improved urban planning and policies.

Slide 7

Safe Cities for Women will increase the safety of women in Guatemala City, Guatemala and San Salvador, El Salvador by helping local women collaborate with the local government and urban planners to create practical solutions, public policies and municipal plans that will decrease the risk of violence against women in their cities.

Slide 8

Information on gender and urban security will be used by networks, organizations, governments and international agencies. Criminal trends will be analyzed to incorporate a gender perspective into urban safety policies. These studies will also develop data and statistics on gender-based violence to predict criminal trends. This information will also be used to influence urban policy-making.

Slide 9

The program will launch public sensitization campaigns about women's rights, and the gender and security situation, in the most violent districts of Guatemala City and San Salvador. Women's organizations will be encouraged to form coalitions, walk through neighborhoods to assess security, and build skills to influence governments and the institutions in charge of public policies on security. Penal codes and discriminatory legislation will be revised. This includes making types of sexual violence to women in public places, which is currently not against the law, criminal offenses.

Slide 10

These actions should result in better understanding of the link between urban violence and gender, and influence the ongoing debates on violence and urban security. In addition, this understanding should ensure that Gender Based Violence is taken into consideration by social organizations and governments. Finally, the urban development plans developed with the participation of women's organizations, civil society and local authorities, will emphasize a gender perspective.

Slide 11

Women's networks and organizations will gain capacity to influence local governments on gender issues and women's safety in public policies; and the information gained about violence against women and urban security will be distributed to the public.

Slide 14

Since the program in Guatemala and El Salvador began:

Women's organizations have submitted proposals to local authorities to improve public spaces and have made exploratory walks in 3 districts to identify insecure spaces. The proposals of the women have been presented by them, not only to local police authorities, but also to congressional representatives.

Among other results, an abandoned house used by drug addicts and alcoholics has been transformed into a day shelter for people living with HIV/AIDS.

In El Salvador a diagnosis of unsafe spaces has been developed for the municipality of Suchitoto, creating a map that highlights the perceptions of local women of the places where they feel they may suffer violence. The results were presented to local authorities, the Minister of Justice and Police Security and the National Director of the National civil police, who are committed to advance the implementation of the recommendations.

Slide 15

During the next phase, the program will focus its efforts on the most violent districts of Guatemala City and San Salvador to increase the visibility of information on violence against women in urban spaces. There will also be efforts to replicate the experience in all districts of the two capital cities and incorporate the issue of violence against women with the occurrence of HIV/AIDS.

Slide 16

The project works with women's organizations and networks to strengthen their coalitions and advocacy skills.

Partnerships have been established with key municipal authorities, including the mayor, planning and security offices, and police. Other partnerships have been developed with those responsible for planning, implementing and monitoring urban security policies and programs on a national level.

Communications media are important partners for public outreach and awareness- raising about gender discrimination and security risk in urban areas, as well as for promoting safe neighborhoods in Guatemala City and San Salvador. UNIFEM will also continue and strengthen its collaboration with other UN and international development agencies including Zonta International.

Slide 17

The safe cities for women approach is a relatively new area of activism that requires further development of knowledge and experiences. This will allow for the measurement and sharing experiences, initiatives and results from cities and communities all over the world.

Measuring the results of the safe cities for women program is a lengthy process that will evaluate changes in the everyday life of women and girls as they use and enjoy the cities in which they live.