PROTECTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN – NOW

The global situation regarding violence against women and children is at pandemic proportions. This trend has persisted over the past few years with numbers continuing to rise. The writer of an article in the UN Chronicle says that at UN–Women, they even refer to this scourge as the "shadow pandemic" in the wake of COVID–19.

Estimates published by World Health Organization (WHO) "indicate that globally about 1 in 3 women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence; and about 7% have experienced non–partner sexual violence in their lifetime".

Similarly, Global Health Action estimates that "6 in 10 (almost 1 billion) children worldwide aged 2–14, experience regular physical punishment, and even higher proportions (about 7 in 10) experience psychological aggression".

The United Nations reveals that since the onset of the COVID–19 pandemic, violence against women and children has intensified. "Unemployment, economic instability and stress may lead offenders to feel a loss of that power, which in turn may exacerbate the frequency and severity of their abusive behaviour," says the UN.

UN Women suggests the following actions that can help end violence against women and children:

- Listen to survivors and take their accounts seriously – "Survivors of violence are speaking out more than ever before, and everyone has a role to play to ensure they can have justice".

- Respond and find services that are appropriate – "This means that shelters, hotlines, counselling and all support for survivors of gender–based violence need to be available for those in need, even during the coronavirus pandemic".

- Learn about consent – "Adopt enthusiastic consent in your life and talk about it".

- Understand the signs of abuse and how to help – A partner may be controlling, threatening or abusive, physically or psychologically, and may exhibit signs of jealousy. Explore ways to help find safety and support.

- Fund organisations that empower women and children. "Amplify their voices, support survivors, and promote acceptance of all gender identities and sexualities."

Hold each other accountable and know the data – Call out rape culture or inappropriate sexual jokes or comments, and tackle harassment to create safer environments. "Call on your government to invest in the collection of data on gender–based violence."