



## EVENT BRIEF



# “Leaving No One Behind in Action”

## UN Heads of Agencies Visit to a Sanctuary for Women, Adama, Ethiopia

UNCT members arrive at the safe house

Photos © Helen Yosef / UN Women

The space is warm, homely and welcoming. Everyone who has come and gone through the corridors cannot help it but just be generous with their smiles. It is ‘bitter sweet’ feeling as one of the visitors dubbed it. The figures presented spoke volume of the details of how low human beings can sink at times, shocked at the number of rape cases on young girls as young as 6 years old, and perpetrators as close as fathers. The stories are to some extent heartbreaking but what the safe house has done to these women is powerful, and such a noble cause.

The Association for Women’s Sanctuary and Development (AWSAD) is the largest Safe House in Ethiopia and one of the projects supported by UN Women to provide a comprehensive package of services to survivors of violence. The AWSAD safe house in Adama was set up in 2011, becoming the first safe house in Oromia region, providing comprehensive services to over 100 women and girl survivors of violence at any one given time. The service includes shelter, food, medical care, legal aid, psychological support and counselling.

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**“The place oozes dignity, which gives a lot of hope, and assurance that these people will be fine”**

Ms Ahunna, Eziakonwa-Onochie, UN Resident Coordinator

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As 28 heads UN agencies in Ethiopia were to meet in Adama Town for a two day UNCT Annual Retreat, a number of Heads of Agencies, including the UN Resident Coordinator, and Heads of Agencies of UNAIDs, UNOPS, WHO, UNCDF, and UN Women paid a visit to the AWSAD safe house. During the visit, Maria Munir, founder and director of AWSAD briefed the visitors on the details of how the shelters operate since its establishment. According to the Director, given the nature of the shelter services, AWSAD has benefited from the support and partnership with a range of stakeholders such as the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, the City Administration, the police, and the judiciary.

A former high-court judge herself, Maria speaks of how heartbreaking the violence against women and girls’ cases are. In most instances, the legal cases are dismissed half way through for the primary witnesses, the women, are either not available to follow their cases or have the capacity and strength to push the cases through. But now, she added, the shelter makes it easy for the women to receive holistic services such as health, counseling, capacity building and rehabilitation, skills trainings, reintegration and most of all, to have a place to go back to after long court days and appointments, hence access to justice. The lengthy processes of the court hearings, as per the Director, influenced the revision of the initial plan to accommodate the survivors for only three months. Now, the women can stay as long as they are ready for the next step in their lives.

At the end of the visit, Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa-Onochie the UN Resident Coordinator, on behalf of the team and stated, “as we gather in this town for our retreat, we will most importantly reflect on how to pull all our efforts together to support such causes”. She continued, “We go into this retreat inspired, by the personal, the community and staff commitments we have witnessed in this safe house”.

She applauded UN Women for its support for such a noble cause, and its continued leadership to advocate for and campaign for an end to Violence against Women and Girls. She also underlined, “*the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals uphold the principle of **Leaving No one Behind** and, if Maria had not done what she did, these women would have been left behind, it is even hard to imagine what would be their fate*”. She stressed, “*as UN, we recognize each other’s humanity, and we value your tremendous contribution.*”



UNRC Ms Ahunna Eziakonwa-Onochie talks to the Director, Maria Munir

Photos © Helen Yosef / UN Women



UNRC Ms Ahunna Eziakonwa-Onochie consoles a crying baby

Photos © Helen Yosef / UN Women

As all the male participants to the visit jointly cut the bread – a tradition which embodies appreciation, they all committed to continue to be male champions for ending Violence Against Women. There was a general agreement that as the UN system in Ethiopia we need to do more to ensure that such initiatives are replicated to other major cities. All left the place somber and humbled by the experience and questioning themselves “When shall we move from safe houses to a safe world where women and young girls are free and have the opportunity to actively contribute to transform Ethiopia”.



Male members of the UNCT cut the home-made bread

Photos © Helen Yosef / UN Women

UN Women has been supporting AWSAD since 2010 in running these two-safe houses in Adama, Oromia region as part of its Preventing and Responding to Violence against Women and Girls in Ethiopia Programme which is generously funded by the Government of Ireland, through Irish Aid, and the Danish Royal Embassy in Ethiopia.