

## PREFACE

I am pleased that the publication of this book takes place at the beginning of the Pan American Health Organization's first administration to be headed by a woman, and that in this, my first book preface, I have the opportunity to place on record my commitment to turning the tide against gender-based violence in the Region of the Americas.

The voices of the women you will hear throughout this book's narrative are rooted in the reality of their everyday lives and call for a compassionate response in the form of recognition and an end to their suffering. The first call for action, to be sure, focuses on the health sector. But implicit in the ultimate, all-encompassing response is action by a diverse partnership involving governments and communities of doctors, nurses, and other health professionals working alongside their counterparts: political leaders, the police and court systems, NGOs, schools, and churches.

PAHO's work in Central America to end violence and to utilize health as a bridge to create long-lasting peace began in 1985, and improving the health situation of women was, and continues to be, a cornerstone of the efforts of PAHO and the international community to consolidate democracy and subregional integration. For more than a decade, the Governments of Norway and Sweden have recognized the pivotal role of women in families and communities in the construction of peace at its most basic and elemental level, and the Nordic cooperation's steadfast belief in this principle is largely responsible for the groundwork that has made this book possible.

Finally, I would like this book full of voices to serve as our social conscience as we embark on an international, interagency campaign during 2003 and beyond to lead and support community initiatives to prevent gender-based violence and to empower women and girls everywhere to realize their full potential and offer our societies the rewards of their wisdom and experience.

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