Why a barbershop?
Almost every man has been to a barbershop. These are spaces where men talk to each other; where behaviors and attitudes about gender relations, including what it means to be a man, are learned and reinforced. While relations between men and women are often discussed among men in barbershops, these conversations often reflect the stereotyped roles of women and men and rarely focus on serious issues at the root of discrimination and violence against women. 

Barbershops can provide a setting for men-to-men discussions about their own role, privileges and behaviors in realizing women’s rights and ending violence against women.

Gender inequality is one of the most significant human rights and development issues facing the world. It harms women and girls and limits communities’ and nations’ potential. The effort to promote gender equality is too often seen as a “women’s issue”, with only women interested or responsible. To solve this global challenge, we must bring men and boys into the conversation.

The “Barbershop Conference”, to be held in New York on 14-15 January 2015, will rally men and boys to commit to upholding gender equality and change the discourse among their peers.

The conference will enlist its attendees to move away from a discourse loaded with negative gender stereotypes and expectations. Through their own behavior, men can work toward the positive transformation of social norms. At the conference, they will examine the role of men as change agents on gender equality who take responsibility for their actions and encourage other men to join in. This will help stimulate a grassroots dialogue between/among men and build on the progress made by recent movements such as the HeForShe campaign.

The focus of the Conference is ending violence against women and girls – the most pervasive violation of human rights and an unacceptable manifestation of gender-based discrimination and inequality. In particular, men will be encouraged to look at their own attitudes and behavior and how they relate to the perpetuation of men’s violence against women. Various studies have shown linkages between rigid definitions of what it means to be a man or a woman and men’s use of violence against women. In a wide variety of settings, the most consistent predictor of attitudes condoning violence against women is beliefs about appropriate roles for men and women.

Not all men are perpetrators of violence, but all men can help prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls, whether they act as concerned individuals, relatives, friends, bystanders or activists.
**Expected outcomes**

- Permanent Representatives to the United Nations who commit to discussing more actively the role of men in realizing gender equality within the UN and beyond
- Sharing of and support for non-discriminatory and non-sexist male attitudes and behavior between men
- Concrete strategies to further engage men to end violence against women and girls
- Exposure of the issue beyond New York through media, UN agencies and other stakeholders

**Why Focus on Men?**

Progress towards gender equality is held back by unequal power relations between women and men. Overcoming this barrier requires not only laws and policies but also a change in attitudes and behaviors. **Men need to engage other men** in finding solutions.

The Barbershop Conference will look at innovative ways for men to mobilize and motivate other men to address discriminatory stereotypes of masculinity. It will identify ways for men to talk about gender equality in comfortable and safe environments, and will address how male leaders can drive this dialogue forward.

**Building Momentum for Gender Equality**

The Barbershop Conference will take place in the lead-up to the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+20). It will be anchored in the Beijing+20 campaign **“Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture it!”** that aims to create broad political and social support for accelerated implementation of gender equality initiatives.

The conference also aligns with the **HeForShe movement**, which is engaging men and boys as advocates for gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights. Over the next 12 months until September 2015, HeForShe will bring together one half of humanity, in support of the other half, for the benefit of all.

The Barbershop Conference will take place shortly after the second **Global Symposium on Men and Boys**, held in November 2014 in New Delhi, India. As such, it will provide a platform to share the Symposium’s outcomes with New York-based Permanent Missions and organizations.

**Participants from all Walks of Life**

The Barbershop Conference will unite **experts and activists** from across the world, as well as representatives of UN Member States, in particular Permanent Representatives to the United Nations in New York.

The conference will therefore be split in two parts. One part will gather men to focus on engaging men and boys. The other part will be a discussion between men and women on how to bring men and boys into our common struggle to achieve gender equality and end violence against women and girls.