

# 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE

## November 25 - December 10, 2008



### Campaign Profile

#### What is the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign?

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence is an international campaign originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute sponsored by the Center for Women's Global Leadership in 1991. Participants chose the dates, November 25, International Day Against Violence Against Women, and December 10, International Human Rights Day, in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasize that such violence is a human rights violation. This 16-day period also highlights other significant dates, including November 29, International Women Human Rights Defenders Day, December 1, World AIDS Day, and December 6, the Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre. (See enclosed "Key Dates" for more information.)

The 16 Days Campaign has been commemorated by individuals and groups around the world who use a human rights framework to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women by:

- raising awareness at the local, national, regional and international levels
- strengthening local work
- linking local and global work
- providing a forum for dialogue and strategy-sharing
- pressuring governments to implement commitments made in national and international legal instruments
- demonstrating the solidarity of activists around the world

#### What is violence against women?

"Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. And it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace."

Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations  
"A World Free of Violence Against Women"  
United Nations Global Videoconference, 8 March 1999

Violence against women is a pervasive human rights violation, a public health crisis, and an obstacle to equality, development, security and peace. The terms "violence against women" and "gender-based violence" are used to refer to a range of abuses committed against women that stem from gender inequality and women's subordinate status in society relative to men. In 1993, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defined violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." This definition includes violence occurring in the family, within the general community, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State. Forms of gender-based violence include, but are not limited to, domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, sexual harassment, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and harmful traditional practices. In addition, women's multiple and intersecting identities based on factors such as class, race, ethnicity, religion, descent, sexuality and citizenship status can serve to increase their subordination and vulnerability to violence. It is estimated that one in three women throughout the world will suffer some form of gender-based violence in her lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Heise, L., M. Ellsberg and M. Gottemoeller. 1999. *Ending Violence Against Women*. Population Reports, Series L, No. 11. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, Population Information Program.

## What is the human rights framework?

“By placing women’s concerns and aspirations within a human rights paradigm, we have made an undeniable proposition: that women are human and that, on that basis, they claim and are entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms inherent in all humanity.”

Florence Butegwa  
“Women 2000: A Symposium on Future Directions for Women’s Human Rights”  
New York, June 2000

Using a human rights-based approach to fight violence against women is a key component of the 16 Days Campaign. Activists have used the human rights framework to transform how violence against women is understood around the world. The human rights framework asserts that women are entitled to the protection, promotion and fulfillment of their human rights as one half of humanity. The framework provides important language and tools to “define, analyze, and articulate women’s experiences of violation and to demand redress in ways already recognized by the international community.”<sup>2</sup> Abuses against women can no longer be relegated to the so-called “private” sphere, and accountability is demanded of States to uphold commitments to women’s human rights made in a number of treaties and international documents within the United Nations system. A human rights-based approach provides a common framework that brings together women with diverse experiences to collaborate on a wide array of creative strategies for change.

The human rights framework has been used by NGOs at the local, national, regional and international levels to strengthen their work against gender-based violence. As a strategy, the human rights framework can be described in seven principles<sup>3</sup>:

1. **Dignity:** The core basis of human rights is the protection and promotion of human dignity.
2. **Universality:** The universal nature of human rights does not mean that they are experienced in the same manner for all people. Universality means that governments and communities should uphold certain moral and ethical values that cut across all regions of the world.
3. **Equality and non-discrimination:** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international human rights documents afford the same rights and responsibilities equally to all women and men, all girls and boys, by virtue of their humanity regardless of any role or relationship they may have. When violations against women are not recognized as human rights abuses, women are collectively diminished as human beings and denied their inherent personhood.
4. **Indivisibility:** Women’s rights should be addressed as an indivisible body, including political, social, economic, cultural and collective rights. These cannot be “prioritized” or divided into “generations” of rights, some of which should be achieved before others.
5. **Interconnectedness:** Human rights concerns appear in all spheres of life – home, school, workplace, elections, court, etc. Violations of human rights are interconnected; loss of human rights in one area may mean loss in another. At the same time, promotion of human rights in one area supports other human rights.
6. **Government responsibility:** Human rights are not gifts bestowed at the pleasure of governments. Nor should governments withhold them or apply them to some people, but not to others. When they do so, they must be held accountable.
7. **Private responsibility:** Governments are not the only perpetrators of human rights violations against women. Corporations and private individuals should also be held accountable; cultural mores and social traditions that subordinate women should be challenged.

International human rights treaties and declarations created within the United Nations that address violence against women and require States to take action include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW, 1993), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute, 1998), Millennium Declaration (2000) and Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (2000), among others. For more information on these and other documents, please see the Bibliography and Resource List. For information on how to use these documents, see the Suggested Actions.

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<sup>2</sup> Bunch, Charlotte. From Mertus, J., N. Flowers and M. Dutt. 1999. *Local Action, Global Change: Learning About the Human Rights of Women and Girls*. UNIFEM and the Center for Women’s Global Leadership, pg. V.

<sup>3</sup> From Mertus, J., N. Flowers and M. Dutt, 1999. pg. 3-4.

## **18 years of 16 Days**

Historically, the 16 Days Campaign has been instrumental in using a human rights framework to draw global attention to the worldwide problem of violence against women. In its early years (1991-1992), 16 Days activists initiated a worldwide petition calling for the United Nations to place women's human rights issues on the agenda for the World Conference on Human Rights in June of 1993 in Vienna, Austria. By the time of the conference, the petition had collected half a million signatures in 23 languages from 124 countries. The petition helped secure a formal declaration of women's rights as human rights and of violence against women as a human rights violation in the Vienna Declaration. Also, in 1999, the 16 Days Campaign was part of successful efforts to push the United Nations to declare November 25 as International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Activists at the local, national and regional levels have realized successes through activities as varied as media campaigns, campus rallies, art exhibitions, lobbying, roundtable discussions, theater performances, tribunals, and workshops. (For more information on events over the years around the world, please see the International Calendars of Activities from 1991-2007, available online.)

### **Over 2,000 organizations in approximately 156 countries have participated in the 16 Days Campaign since 1991!**

Every year, CWGL composes a campaign theme in consultation with women's human rights advocates worldwide and then circulates an announcement for the campaign as widely as possible. The themes over the years are as follows:

- **1991/1992:** Violence Against Women Violates Human Rights
- **1993:** Democracy without Women's Human Rights . . . is not Democracy
- **1994:** Awareness, Accountability, Action: Violence Against Women Violates Human Rights
- **1995:** Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing: Bringing Women's Human Rights Home
- **1996:** Bringing Women's Human Rights Home: Realizing Our Visions
- **1997:** Demand Women's Human Rights in the Home and in the World
- **1998:** Building a Culture of Respect for Human Rights
- **1999:** Fulfilling the Promise of Freedom from Violence
- **2000:** Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the Campaign
- **2001:** Racism and Sexism: No More Violence
- **2002:** Creating a Culture That Says 'No' to Violence Against Women
- **2003:** Violence Against Women Violates Human Rights: Maintaining the Momentum Ten Years After Vienna (1993-2003)
- **2004/2005:** For the Health of Women, For the Health of the World: NO MORE VIOLENCE
- **2006:** Celebrate 16 years of 16 days: Advance Human Rights ↔ End Violence Against Women
- **2007:** Demanding Implementation, Challenging Obstacles: End Violence Against Women!
- **2008:**

### **Human Rights for Women ↔ Human Rights for All: Celebrating 60 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

The 2008 16 Days Campaign dedicates this year's theme to the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the recognition that human rights cannot be universal without human rights for women. The UDHR60 campaign offers an opportunity to celebrate the past 60 years of women's advocacy and to advocate for women's rights to be fulfilled, including the right to live free from violence. For more information, please see the documents enclosed in this kit.

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