

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE

November 25 - December 10, 2003



Violence Against Women Violates Human Rights: Maintaining the Momentum Ten Years After Vienna (1993-2003)

In June of 1993, representatives of nations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) from around the world gathered in Vienna, Austria for the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights. Women's human rights advocates had worked for two years nationally, regionally and globally to ensure that women's rights were recognized as human rights there and that violence against women was included in the discussion. The resulting document, the Vienna Declaration and Platform of Action signed by 171 states, was historic in its emphasis on the global pervasiveness of gender-based violence and in its compelling appeal to governments and the United Nations to take action to eliminate such violence. The document declared:

The human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. Gender-based violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation, including those resulting from cultural prejudice and international trafficking, are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person, and must be eliminated. (*Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 1993, p. 33*).

Since the Conference, significant gains have been made on the international level for the movement to end violence against women. In December of 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW). In 1994, the UN Commission on Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences to monitor the various manifestations of gender violence on a worldwide scale. In 1995, the UN held the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing where women's human rights advocates again demanded that their governments take concrete measures to improve the status of women. The resulting Beijing Platform for Action included an entire chapter devoted to eliminating violence against women. In 2000 the Platform for Action was reviewed by the UN General Assembly and the resulting document sought to strengthen government's commitments to fulfilling the human rights of women worldwide.

Ten years have passed since the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and the DEVAW, and it is time to look at how both the human rights framework and various international initiatives have affected the work being done to end violence against women at the grassroots level. In many countries, advancements have been made. For example:

- In Ghana, a program that combats domestic violence using community-based response systems has recently been initiated in rural areas of the country.
- In Fiji, the Violence Against Women Taskforce was established, in which government agencies and NGOs work together on the issue of violence against women in Fiji based on the government's commitment to the Beijing Platform of Action.
- In Croatia, the Family Law went into effect on July 1, 1999 and for the first time the phrase "domestic violence" was mentioned in formal legislation.
- In the United States, a National Domestic Violence Hotline was established in 1994 as part of the Violence Against Women Act and has since answered over 860,000 calls.
- In Malaysia, an amendment was added to the Federal Constitution in 2001 to include sex along with religion, race, and descent as grounds for non-discrimination.
- All Latin American countries now have legislation outlawing domestic violence.

And the 16 Days Campaign itself continues to grow with the participation of over one thousand organizations in approximately one hundred and thirty countries! But of course there is much work yet to be done, as violence against women continues to pervade all corners of the globe. In appreciation of the tenth anniversary of the Vienna breakthrough, participants are encouraged to reflect on the advances and challenges of their anti-violence work during the past decade. As activists from different locations involved in the struggle to eliminate gender-based violence and ensure women's human rights in our communities and in the world, it is crucial that we take time to consider where the movement has been and where it is heading. What advancements have been made in your community, organization, region and country? What are the major issues and obstacles you still face? What are the major obstacles still confronting us all at the global level? How has framing violence against women as a human rights concern affected your work? How can we continue to strengthen the level of collaboration among 16 Days advocates around the world? By continuing to examine these issues critically we can expand upon our strengths as organizers, prevail over the difficulties we face and enable social change.

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