

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE

November 25 - December 10



Description of Campaign Dates

International Day Against Violence Against Women, November 25th

November 25 was declared International Day Against Violence Against Women at the first Feminist Encuentro for Latin America and the Caribbean held in Bogota, Colombia, July 18-21, 1981. At that Encuentro women systematically denounced all forms of gender violence from domestic battery to rape and sexual harassment to state violence including torture and abuse of women political prisoners. November 25 was chosen to commemorate the violent assassination of the Mirabal sisters (Patria, Minerva and Maria Teresa) on November 25, 1960 by the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. In 1999, the United Nations officially recognized November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

What are the feminist encuentros?

The "feminist encuentros" are conferences of feminists from Latin America who come together every 2-3 years in a different Latin American country in order to exchange experiences and to reflect upon the state of the women's movement. Issues surrounding sexuality and violence have always been included in the wide ranging themes of these gatherings. These encounters have stimulated the creation of regional networks, workshops, video and radio programs, women's studies curricula, and a growing number of women's documentation centers throughout the region that are dedicated to collecting and making available information about the history and priorities of the women's movement. They have also provided a space for formulating and discussing the focus of a growing number of women's magazines and newsletters, which contain articles, analysis and reports of the extensive actions being undertaken by women throughout the region.

Who were the Mirabal sisters?

Patria, Minerva, Maria Teresa and Dedé were born in Ojo de Agua near the city of Salcedo, in the Cibao region of the Dominican Republic. "Las Mariposas (the Butterflies)," as they were called, were political activists and highly visible symbols of resistance to Trujillo's dictatorship. They were repeatedly jailed, along with their husbands, for their revolutionary activities toward democracy and justice. On November 25, 1960 three of the Mirabal sisters, Minerva, Patria and Maria Teresa were murdered along with Rufino de la Cruz by members of Trujillo's secret police. The three women were being driven by Rufino to Puerto Plata to visit their imprisoned husbands. The bodies of the three sisters were found at the bottom of a precipice broken and strangled. The news of their brutal assassinations shocked and outraged the nation and helped propel the anti-Trujillo movement. Trujillo was assassinated on May 30, 1961 and his regime fell soon after.

The Mirabal sisters have become symbols of both popular and feminist resistance. In the years since their deaths, they have been commemorated in poems, songs and books. An exhibition of their belongings has been mounted at the National Museum of History and Geography, a stamp has been issued in their memory and a private foundation is raising money to renovate a family museum in their hometown. On March 8, 1997, International Women's Day, a mural was unveiled on the 137-foot obelisk (that Trujillo had erected in his honor) in Santo Domingo. It depicts the images of the four sisters. The painting on the obelisk is entitled "Un Canto a la Libertad" (A Song to Liberty).

For more information see Julia Alvarez's fictional account of the Mirabal sisters in her 1994 novel, "In the Time of the Butterflies;" Bernard Diederich's book "Trujillo: The Death of the Dictator;" and "The Mirabal Sisters," in Connexions, an International Women's Quarterly, No. 39, 1992.

World AIDS Day, December 1st

World AIDS Day is observed every year on December 1. This day marks the beginning of an annual campaign designed to encourage public support for and development of programs to prevent the spread of HIV infection and provide education and promote awareness of issues surrounding HIV/AIDS. It was first observed in 1988 after a summit of health ministers from around the world called for a spirit of social tolerance and a greater exchange of information on HIV/AIDS. World AIDS Day serves to strengthen the global effort to face the challenges of the AIDS pandemic.

For more information about World AIDS Day and the current theme, contact UNAIDS Secretariat, 20 avenue Appia, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland, ph: (41-22)791 3666, fax: (41-22)791 4187, e-mail: <unaid@unaid.org>, website: <<http://www.unaid.org>>.

The Montreal Massacre, December 6th

On Wednesday, December 6, 1989 a 25 year-old man named Marc Lepine walked into the University of Montreal's School of Engineering Building at about five in the afternoon with a .223 calibre semi-automatic rifle. He began a shooting spree during which he murdered fourteen women and injured thirteen others: nine women and four men. Marc Lepine believed it was because of women students that he was not accepted to the engineering school. Before killing himself, he left an explanatory letter behind which contained a tirade against feminists as well as a list of nineteen prominent women whom he particularly despised.

The fourteen women who were murdered in the massacre were: Anne-Marie Edward, Anne-Marie Lemay, Annie St. Arneault, Annie Turcotte, Barbara Daigneault, Barbara Maria Klueznick, Genevieve Bergeron, Helen Colgan, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganier, Maryse Leclair, Michele Richard, Natalie Croteau and Sonia Pelletier.

These women became symbols, tragic representatives, of the injustice against women. Women's groups across the country organized vigils, marches and memorials. There was an increase in support for educational programs and resources to reduce violence against women. Both federal and provincial governments made commitments to end violence against women. In 1991, the Canadian government proclaimed December 6th National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. In 1993, an organization calling itself the Dec. 6 Coalition set up a revolving fund for women leaving violent situations to establish themselves and their children in a safer, more secure environment. Also in 1993 a campaign called Zero Tolerance was launched offering men the opportunity to show solidarity with women against violence against women. As a direct result of the massacre, several mothers of the victims began groups to restrict gun laws and promote awareness of the continued violence against women.

For more information see "The Montreal Massacre" edited by Louise Malette & Marie Chalouh, Gynergy Books/Ragweed Pr; ISBN: 0921881142 or visit the Men for Change website at <<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca>>.

International Human Rights Day, December 10th

On December 10 peoples and states the world over celebrate the 1948 adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. On this landmark date in contemporary history, the nations of the world joined together to try and bury, once and for all, the spectre of genocide raised by the Second World War. This document was one of the first major achievements of the United Nations and provided the basic philosophy for many legally binding international instruments to follow. Resolution 217A (III) by the General Assembly, proclaims the "*Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms..."

Organizations and individuals use Human Rights Day as an opportunity to both commemorate the signing of this historical document and to promote the principles that it embodies. Human Rights Day, according to High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, is "an occasion to demonstrate that the principles of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* were not theoretical or abstract."

To obtain a copy of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and to see a description of activities the United Nations has planned for Human Rights Day, please visit the UN website at <<http://www.unhcr.ch/ludhrl/index.htm>>.