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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND HIV/AIDS: HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT FOCUSES ON WOMEN'S ADVOCACY

NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS ACTIVISM AT INTERSECTIONS OF CRISES OF VIOLENCE AND HIV/AIDS: RELEASED BY CENTER FOR WOMEN'S GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

*In honor of World AIDS Day (December 1) and International Women Human Rights Defenders Day (November 29), the Center for Women's Global Leadership is launching the online version of its new human rights report, **Strengthening Resistance: Confronting Violence Against Women and HIV/AIDS**.*

Women in both the global South and North face not only staggering rates of HIV infection, but also unabating levels of violence, whether at the hands of male partners, police, or community members. While most see these as distinct, women around the world are now calling attention to the ways these experiences can be fundamentally linked. When women are -- or are even *perceived* to be HIV+ -- they are at risk of violence, discrimination and other human rights violations. And when women are sexually assaulted, whether in conflict situations or in their homes, they are at risk of contracting HIV.

UNAIDS now estimates that there are 17.7 million women living with HIV. There is urgent need for activists and policymakers to make links between these two crises as they create and reinforce each other. "Defenders of women's human rights and HIV activists alike are increasingly focusing on these intersections and holding governments accountable to address them, to punish perpetrators, and to fund initiatives that keep women's human rights, gender equality and feminist principles central to the debate," claims Charlotte Bunch, Executive Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University.

Strengthening Resistance focuses on the points of intersection in the social, political and public health crises of violence against women (VAW) and HIV/AIDS. The report uses a human rights lens to highlight critical political challenges and innovative strategies used by activists and human rights defenders worldwide as they respond to the links between the two pandemics. From street theater to telenovelas/soap operas to traditional lobbying, activists in both VAW and HIV/AIDS communities are beginning to work together to focus attention to ways both crises are causes and consequences of each other. Neither crisis can be stemmed without taking into account the human rights implications of each on its own *and in conjunction with the other*.

"Women's HIV and VAW advocacy is grounded in ideas and practices of resistance: resistance to the virulence of HIV transmission, resistance to pervasive experiences of violence, resistance to governmental complacency and resistance to sexist and discriminatory attitudes and prejudices," asserts Cynthia Rothschild, Senior Policy Advisor at CWGL, and the primary author of ***Strengthening Resistance***. "This report is rooted in building immunity -- primarily through novel ideas and strategic

advocacy, both of which are highlighted in the stories of people working precisely at the points where violence against women and HIV/AIDS meet.”

Strengthening Resistance provides an overview of the most salient issues, including challenges presented by restrictive and ideologically-driven government donor policies, and in coalition building across HIV and women’s movements. It is designed for activists, human rights defenders and policy makers alike. The report highlights nine creative advocacy initiatives from different countries and regions, including South Africa, Haiti, Vietnam, Spain and India. It offers recommendations to governments, UN bodies and non-governmental organizations, and contains a resource section for further study.



Strengthening Resistance will be highlighted along with other topics related to violence against women on the evening of December 7, 2006 when the Center for Women’s Global Leadership celebrates *16 Years of 16 Days*, the anniversary of its annual **16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence** campaign. *Claiming Our Rights, Defending Our Future* will take place in New York, at the Church Center, 777 UN Plaza (44th street at First Avenue) from 5:30 – 8pm. For more information, see <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/events.html>. The event will feature an overview of current concerns and also focus on successes in women’s worldwide advocacy against violence.

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Strengthening Resistance: Confronting Violence Against Women and HIV/AIDS. Researched, written and edited by Cynthia Rothschild, Sara A. Nordstrom and Mary Anne Reilly. Center for Women’s Global Leadership, 2006; Full PDF version available at <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/publications/strengthening.pdf>. To order hard copy, see <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/publications/strengthening.htm>.

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