

Center for Women's Global Leadership



CELEBRATING 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE AND THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

International Human Rights Day: December 10, 2008

As the 2008 *16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign* comes to a close, and as human rights activists celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) would like to remind the world that universal human rights cannot be realized unless women have the right to live free of violence. Today we want to honor the group of 25 women from around the world who founded the *16 Days* in 1991, as well as the hundreds of groups around the world who participated in the *16 Days Campaign* this year and the countless individuals who have undertaken acts of courageous activism in defense of rights in the past twelve months.

In 2008, just as in previous years, women from all parts of the globe have defended human rights, peace and social justice on a daily basis. As Charlotte Bunch, Executive Director of CWGL noted, "Because of the content and focus of their advocacy, and sometimes *simply because they are women who choose to engage in activism*, women continue to be punished and abused by government officials, religious authorities, police, and often by family and community members."

It is not only activists who face a range of violations; women in both the global North and South face unabating levels of violence, and abuses such as arbitrary imprisonment, torture, forced disappearances, death threats, violations of privacy, and verbal and physical harassment. The entire world should be chagrined that on a global level, one in three women will experience some form of violence in her lifetime. The magnitude of this abuse is inexcusable.

Eighteen years ago, the Center for Women's Global Leadership hosted its first Women's Global Leadership Institute on Human Rights and Violence Against Women at Rutgers University in New Jersey. At this meeting, 25 women from all regions of the world created the *16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence*, taking it back to their own countries to organize locally. Everjoice Win of Zimbabwe, now head of the Women's Rights Program at ActionAid International, was one of those women: "We knew we were creating an extraordinary collaborative international action. We might not have known that 16 Days would take off around the world the way it did, but we knew it was significant and unprecedented." Set to "bookend" November 25th (the International Day Against Violence Against Women) and December 10th (Human Rights Day), *16 Days* encompasses Women Human Rights Defenders Day (November 29th), World AIDS Day (December 1), and the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre (December 6). Each of these days provides opportunities that link women around the world in global solidarity.

Since its inception, CWGL has coordinated this international and decentralized annual campaign, providing resources and background materials for use and adaptation by women and organizations all over the world. As Bunch notes, “We are proud that the *16 Days Campaign* has taken root in 156 countries, and well over 2000 civil society groups have highlighted women’s creative and strategic anti-violence advocacy. Even governments and UN agencies have adopted this civil society campaign to promote their own anti-violence programming.”

In 2008, hundreds of organizations used *16 Days* to plan events and call for recognition of women’s right to live free of violence. Organizing themes this year included: ending violence against women, directing resources to gender-based violence advocacy, focusing on violence and experiences of women human rights defenders and strengthening the UN system to better address the human rights of women.

Examples of 2008 *16 Days* advocacy:

- In India, groups used street plays and road shows to raise awareness about domestic violence in more than 500 towns and villages.
- In Switzerland, unions, women’s organizations, peace organizations, and churches planned a joint calendar of over 50 events, including an exhibit of portraits of 1000 women from around the world.
- In Uganda, one network worked with over 30 African organizations to engage men in dialogues about masculinity and violence.
- In Fiji, one group ran a mobile women’s radio campaign that gives rural women the chance to produce media content.
- In Belize, activists held a Torch Run across the country to bring attention to the intersections between HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence.

In marking December 10th, International Human Rights Day, CWGL also notes the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The international *Every Human Has Rights – Reclaiming the UDHR* international campaign sponsored by “The Elders,” a group of influential human rights activists including Nelson Mandela, Mary Robinson, Kofi Annan and Ela Bhatt among others, brought together a range of prominent human rights organizations to highlight a different theme each month throughout the year. CWGL was proud to be the lead organization of the UDHR60 campaign on women’s issues, with a focus on March, using International Women’s Day, March 8th, as an anchor [<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/udhr60/index.html>].

As these notable dates pass in 2008, CWGL takes the opportunity to pay tribute to the groups and individuals who challenged human rights abuses throughout the year, and of course, the many women who were victims and survivors of violence. In coming months, with allies and colleagues, we look forward to continuing to commemorate the power and leadership of women in the struggle to defend the human rights of all people.

For more information about the *16 Days Campaign* and to see the online calendar of events, visit CWGL’s website [<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/home.html>].

For information about the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, visit the Defending Women Defending Rights website [<http://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/>].