

INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS TO ELIMINATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Overview

Over the last decade, concern and outrage over the prevalence, magnitude and impact of violence against women (VAW) has grown to the point that VAW is now recognized as a global human rights problem that requires a comprehensive and coordinated response from civil society, the State and the international community. VAW is a violation of several human rights at once, including *inter alia*:

- a. The right to life;
- b. The right to liberty and security of person;
- c. The right to equal protection under the law;
- d. The right not to be subjected to torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- e. The right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health;
- f. The right to equality;
- g. The right to be free from all forms of discrimination; and
- h. The right to just and favourable conditions of work.

This growing concern and attention to VAW has led to the formulation of international, inter-American, national, and institutional commitments to eliminating it. The 1990s saw the development of at least 5 major international declarations and platforms for action that specifically addressed the issue of VAW. Two of these, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (or the Convention of Belem do Pará, 1994) were developed to explicitly guarantee women's right to live violence-free lives. All 5 international instruments are approaching their 10-year anniversaries, providing the international community, national governments and civil society a crucial opportunity to assess the progress that has (or has not) been made in complying with these commitments.

- **World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna Declaration and Platform for Action), 1993**

"In particular, the World Conference on Human Rights stresses the importance of working towards the elimination of violence against women in public and private life, the elimination of all forms of sexual harassment, exploitation and trafficking in women, the elimination of gender bias in the administration of justice and the eradication of any conflicts which may arise between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism...Violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. All violations of this kind, including in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy, require a particularly effective response." (Article 38)

For more information, visit:

<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu5/wchr.htm>

16 Days of Activism

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. The campaign runs from November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women to 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 violation of human rights..

The theme for the 2003 campaign is: "Violence against Women Violates Human Rights: Maintaining the Momentum Ten Years after Vienna (1993-2003)"

More information: <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/home.html#>

- **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993**

In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly resolved "...that violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace...that violence against women constitutes a violation of the rights and freedoms of women ...that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women....that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men...that opportunities for women to achieve legal, social, political and economic equality in society are limited, inter alia, by continuing and endemic violence..."

For more information, visit: [http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/A.RES.48.104.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/A.RES.48.104.En?Opendocument)

- **Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), 1994**

In 1994, the heads of state of the countries of the Americas region declared "...that violence against women constitutes a violation of their human rights and fundamental freedoms...that violence against women pervades every sector of society regardless of class, race or ethnic group, income, culture, level of education, age or religion...that the elimination of violence against women is essential for their individual and social development and their full and equal participation in all walks of life..."

The states then agreed "...to pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, policies to prevent, punish and eradicate such violence...to refrain from engaging in any act or practice of violence against women...to apply due diligence to prevent, investigate and impose penalties for violence against women...to establish fair and effective legal procedures for women who have been subjected to violence...to promote awareness and observance of the right of women to be free from violence...to modify social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women...to counteract prejudices, customs and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes...to provide appropriate specialized services for women who have been subjected to violence...to promote and support governmental and private sector education designed to raise the awareness of the public...to ensure research and the gathering of statistics and other relevant information relating to the causes, consequences and frequency of violence against women"

For more information, visit: <http://www.undp.org/rblac/gender/osavio.htm>

Revisiting Belém do Pará

In preparation for the 10th anniversary of the Convention (2004), the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network is calling for proposals on mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the concrete application of the convention (challenges, opportunities, gaps, and successes).

LACWHN will be feeding this information to the Inter-American Commission of Women at the Organization of American States in order to provide a civil society perspective on the implementation of and compliance with the Convention

For more information (in Spanish): <http://www.reddesalud.org>

- **International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo Programme of Action), 1994**

"Advancing gender equality and equity and the empowerment of women, and **the elimination of all kinds of violence against women**, and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility, are cornerstones of population and development-related programmes. The human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex, are priority objectives of the international community." (Principle 4 – emphasis added).

For more information, visit: <http://www.unfpa.org/icpd/icpd.htm>

- **Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action), 1995**

"Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms..." (Paragraph 112)

Strategic objective D.1 - Take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women.

Strategic objective D.2 - Study the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures.

Strategic objective D.3 - Eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking.

For more information, visit: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/index.html>