



SYMPOSIUM 2001 - CALL TO ACTION

Gender Violence, Health and Rights in the Americas

June 4-7, 2001

We, the participants of the *Symposium 2001: Gender Violence, Health and Rights in the Americas*, call the attention of states, civil society, the media, and organizations of the Inter-American System and of the United Nations, and urge them to take into consideration that:

- The States have assumed responsibilities and obligations through various conventions and international agreements, especially the Inter American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belem do Para), the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its protocols, the United Nations Declaration on Violence against Women, as well as the United Nations Conferences on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development, and the Fourth World Conference on Women;
- Violence against women, in all of its forms throughout the life cycle, constitutes a violation of human rights both in the public as well as the private spheres. It is also an obstacle to equity and a problem of justice. In view of the grave implications it has for women's health, it should be considered a public health priority;
- Gender violence has been perpetuated and tolerated as a result of historical, cultural, racial and structurally rooted inequities in the relations between women and men in different social, cultural and political areas;
- In spite of the existence of protective legislation that punishes violence against women, impunity persists in most countries in the region, exacerbated by the difficulties that women still face in terms of accessing justice;
- Violence against women carries a high social and economic cost in terms of individual, community and national development and has a negative effect on the outlook of future generations to live free of any form of family and community violence, and that which is tolerated and perpetrated by the State;

- Addressing the complexities of gender violence will require that all of the relevant sectors take joint and coordinated actions. These actions should guarantee the protection and respect of women's human rights, taking into consideration diversity of age, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and belief systems, among others;
- Violence against women constitutes a public health problem. Therefore, the health sector has a responsibility to address it, and the response should be holistic and take into account women's emotional, mental and physical well-being throughout their life cycle;
- In addition, it is essential that women have access to both information and education, as well as social, economic, and judicial resources that will enable them to build a life free of violence.

The participants gathered at the Symposium 2001, representing governments, civil society organizations, in particular of the women's movement, organizations of the United Nations and of the Inter-American System, and of international cooperation agencies, recommend:

- That the state guarantee the respect, protection, and exercise of women's human rights, including their rights to a life free of violence, comprehensive health, and the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights, through protection mechanisms that are efficient and accessible to women, and that facilitate the full exercise of their citizenship and empowerment;
- That the state guarantee women's full access to justice, ensuring effective enforcement of existing national legislation, corresponding to ratified international conventions on women's human rights;
- That states ratify the Optional Protocol of the Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination against Women, to guarantee women's full access to international protection mechanisms;
- Encourage states to assign sufficient human and financial resources in national, regional and local budgets, particularly in the health sector, as well as involve the private sector and international cooperation agencies, to reduce the high costs faced by society as a result of gender-based violence;
- Promote the creation of a non-violent culture through education and sensitization strategies targeting women and men, specially through the mass media and the education sector, as fundamental tools to prevent intergenerational and social reproduction of violence;

- Eliminate stereotypes and attitudes that legitimize or exacerbate violence against women and girls, fostering the participation of men and boys in the prevention and eradication of violence against women;
- Promote legislation and institutionalise policies and programmes that address gender equity and violence against women and girls, in all its forms, from an intersectorial approach;
- Integrate and strengthen gender violence prevention and care, at all levels, in health sector policies, programmes, norms and protocols in the context of health sector reform, especially at the primary health care level, in sexual and reproductive and mental health services, emphasising protection for migrant women and women from discriminated ethnic groups;
- Improve the quality of care, through integrated services, that offer dignified and respectful care, while eliminating institutional discriminatory practices;
- Sensitise and train health sector personnel to identify, screen, and care for victims of gender violence, and provide them with the conceptual and technical tools, psychological support and judicial and personal protection that would enable them to actively participate in referring cases to the legal system;
- Strengthen coordination mechanisms between the health and other key sectors for prevention, care and protection, both within governmental and private institutions, including non governmental organisations, ensuring systems to guarantee protection for women in high-risk situations;
- Guarantee women's and adolescents' rights to privacy and confidentiality;
- In cases of rape, promote and facilitate access to emergency contraception, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including AIDS, and access to safe services for pregnancy termination where allowed by law;
- Ensure specialised health care for minors who are victims of incest;
- Standardise methodologies and concepts for information and statistical data collection within the health sector, that illustrate the magnitude of gender violence and which allow for monitoring and impact evaluation, incorporating mechanisms for civil society monitoring;
- Promote research on the causes and consequences of gender violence on women's health;
- Promote addressing gender violence in national, regional and international fora at the highest level.

We urgently appeal to all relevant parties to subscribe to this *Symposium 2001 Call to Action*, convinced that the achievement of its objectives will contribute to building societies in which the full enjoyment and exercise of women's human rights becomes a reality, thereby achieving sustainable development based on equitable gender relations.