

## **“Combating Violence and Discrimination Against Women: A Global Call to Action”**

Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy, and Global Women’s Issues

June 24, 2014

We, the 74 undersigned organizations, wish to thank Chair Barbara Boxer and Ranking Member Rand Paul of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy, and Global Women’s Issues for convening this hearing on “Combating Violence and Discrimination Against Women: A Global Call to Action.” We call on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the U.S. Senate to move forward to pass the International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA) and to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in this Congress. These tools will give the United States greater clout to urge other countries to take all necessary steps to combat discrimination and violence against women and girls.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the most widespread human rights violation in every part of the world. The well-documented cases of using rape as a weapon of war in the Congo, acid attacks on the faces of girls going to school in Afghanistan, the 2012 shooting of Pakistani education and women’s rights activist, Malala Yousafzai, by the Taliban, and the recent horrific sexual assaults and hanging of girls and young women in India are only the most visible evidence of pervasive violence against women and girls. Unfortunately, intimate partner violence, often less visible, is also an epidemic, affecting 35% of women globally every year.<sup>i</sup> Women have organized campaigns calling on their governments not only to adopt laws to provide services and safety for women and their children, bring perpetrators of violence to justice, educate the public, and engage boys and men, but also to address the underlying causes of discrimination and gender inequalities.

In addressing violence against women, many countries have been aided by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), also known as the women’s equality treaty. CEDAW considers gender-based violence – that is, violence directed at women and girls just because they are female – to be a form of discrimination under the Convention, because such violence impairs or nullifies women’s full enjoyment of their basic human rights.<sup>ii</sup>

CEDAW offers countries a practical blueprint to achieve progress for women and girls by calling on each ratifying country to overcome barriers to discrimination. For example, when activists in Afghanistan proposed the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, they looked to CEDAW as a model to guide their approach. The South Korean Women’s Movements Against Gender Violence looked to CEDAW to propose laws on domestic violence, which were then adopted by the government. Mexico, in adopting its General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free from Violence, drew on CEDAW, among other international and regional treaties. Following recommendations from the CEDAW Committee,

Mexico is now training its federal judiciary in human rights, gender-based violence and non-discrimination along with CEDAW to promote women's access to justice. In line with recommendations of the CEDAW Committee, Turkey enacted the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women Law in 2012. Other examples of how CEDAW has been used to combat violence against women can be found in *Recognizing Rights, Promoting Progress: The Global Impact of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women* ([www.icrw.org](http://www.icrw.org)).

187 countries have ratified CEDAW. The United States is one of only seven countries in the world that has not ratified CEDAW, along with Iran, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Palau, and Tonga. The United States' failure to ratify CEDAW undermines its leadership in the global fight to combat discrimination and violence against women, calls into question its credibility, and gives the appearance that the United States does not believe that reducing discrimination and violence against women should be a priority for governments around the world.

The scourge of violence against women and girls, however, threatens the basic security of the United States and the world. This epidemic not only affects women, their families and communities, but it also undermines the stability and prosperity of whole societies. This, in turn, has a direct impact upon U.S. foreign policy, security interests, and democracy and peace-building efforts. Gender-based violence against women does not stop at U.S. borders. Instead, it affects the well-being of all people in the United States by contributing to global instability. The Senate must ratify CEDAW to enhance U.S. leadership in this area and support the important work to combat discrimination and violence against women being done by the U.S. Department of State and other Departments and agencies. CEDAW gives the United States another tool to advance the status of women and increase opportunities for prosperity for everyone.

Another mechanism central to the global prevention of and response to gender-based violence is the bipartisan International Violence Against Women Act, H.R. 3571/S.2307, (IVAWA). IVAWA makes ending violence against women and girls a top diplomatic and foreign assistance priority by codifying, implementing, and giving congressional oversight to the ongoing *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally (the Strategy)*. *The Strategy*, created by Executive Order in August 2012, calls for a coordinated, multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence – a process led by an Interagency Working Group to ensure maximum efficiency. IVAWA also permanently authorizes the State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues with the position of Ambassador-at-Large, who coordinates policies, programs, and funding relating to gender integration and women's empowerment internationally, including those intended to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV). In addition, IVAWA authorizes the position of USAID Senior Gender Coordinator, who is responsible for working with senior leadership and mission staff to fully integrate gender equality and female empowerment into USAID's policies, programs, and strategies. These entities exist within the current structures of both agencies and would not add a new level of bureaucracy; rather, their existence contributes to greater accountability of the gender-focused policies and programming currently in place.

IVAWA would streamline and better coordinate anti-GBV programming across various U.S. government agencies, making addressing GBV a cornerstone of U.S. development and foreign policy. Since this

legislation is aimed at coordinating and integrating existing programs, it does not require the appropriation of additional funding. The bill also focuses on preventing violence by transforming social norms about the acceptability of it. IVAWA recognizes that while women and girls disproportionately suffer from violence, men and boys experience targeted violence too. The bill intentionally utilizes the term GBV throughout, making it inclusive of all persons and not precluding programs from supporting men and boys. IVAWA will support public awareness programs to change attitudes that condone, and at times encourage, violence against women and girls, as well as men and boys, and will emphasize community-based solutions.

This integral piece of legislation would also increase legal and judicial protection to address gender-based violence; integrate programs to address gender-based violence into already existing health programs focused on child survival, health, and HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment; reduce women and girls' vulnerability to violence by improving their economic status and educational opportunities; and, promote women's inclusion in civil and political life.

We believe the United States can and should be a leader in ending one of the biggest obstacles not only to U.S. national security but also global stability, development, prosperity, and human rights for all. Ending violence against women and girls, men and boys, and advancing women's equality is fundamental to the United States' national security interests and today is a cornerstone of America's foreign policy. Countries are more peaceful and prosperous when women have full and equal rights and opportunities. We acknowledge the leadership taken by the United States to condemn gender-based violence wherever it occurs – from Afghanistan and Guatemala, to Nigeria and the DRC, to the gender-based violence women experience every day in the United States – and we applaud the adoption of the Violence Against Women Act of 2013.

But today is a call to action because more needs to be done to combat discrimination and gender-based violence globally. There are two more tools in the United States' toolbox that are before this Committee right now.

We, 74 undersigned organizations, call on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the U.S. Senate to move forward to pass the International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA) and to ratify CEDAW in this Congress. These important tools will give the United States greater ability to work with and support other countries to take all necessary measures to prevent and one day end discrimination and violence against women and girls. The time to act is now.

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American Association of University Women

American Civil Liberties Union

American Jewish Committee

American Jewish World Service

American Psychological Association

Amnesty International USA

Anti-Defamation League  
Baha'is of the United States  
Better World Campaign  
California Women's Agenda  
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies  
The Center for Health and Gender Equity  
Center for Reproductive Rights  
Communications Workers of America  
Decisions In Democracy International  
Demos  
Equality Now  
Feminist Majority  
Freedom House  
Futures Without Violence  
Gender Action  
GlobalSolutions.org  
Guatemala Human Rights Commission  
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.  
Human Rights Advocates  
Human Rights Watch  
The Hunger Project  
IMA World Health  
Institute for Science and Human Values, Inc.  
The Interfaith Center of New York  
International Psychoanalytical Association  
Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights  
Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services  
Jewish Women International  
Jewish World Watch  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
MomsRising  
The National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, Inc.  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council of Women's Organizations  
National Education Association  
National Network to End Domestic Violence  
National Organization for Women  
National Women's Law Center  
Pathfinder International  
Peaceful Families Project  
Population Action International  
The Roosevelt Institute, Women and Girls Rising Program

Tahirih Justice Center  
UJA-Federation of New York  
United Methodist Women  
United Nations Association of the United States of America  
US National Committee for UN Women  
US Women and Cuba Collaboration  
US Women Connect  
Vital Voices Global Partnership  
Women Donors Network  
Women Employed  
Women Enabled  
Women for Women International  
Women Graduates-USA  
Women Legislators' Lobby  
WomenNC  
Women Thrive Worldwide  
Women Watch Afrika, Inc.  
Women's Action for New Directions  
Women's Business Development Center  
Women's Campaign International  
Women's City Club of New York  
Women's Intercultural Network  
Women's UN Report Network  
YWCA USA  
Zonta International

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<sup>i</sup> World Health Organization. Violence against women. 2013.  
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>.

<sup>ii</sup> U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 11th Session, General Recommendation No. 19: Violence Against Women. 1992.