

Ending Violence against Women in the United States and in the Global Community

Worldwide, 1 out of every 3 women has been beaten, forced to have sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime, usually by someone known to her. Help stop violence against women in the United States and beyond by organizing around the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization, U.S. ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the “16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence” (November 25-December 10).

Partner Organizations and Contacts:

The Sheila Wellstone Institute, Elana Wolowitz, elana@wellstone.org, 651-645-3939
Amnesty International, Alyson Kozma, akozma@aiusa.org, 202-544-0200 (interim contact: Meredith Larson, mlarson@aiusa.org)

Background Information

Enacted in 1994, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is a landmark piece of legislation that dramatically improved law enforcement responses to violence against women by making available services to former victims of violence and those at risk. For example, VAWA legislation facilitated the inclusion of stalking as a crime with enhanced penalties and specialized training to law enforcement and prosecution. On the campus level, VAWA legislation touches students' lives in a number of ways. Many campus and community services in which women have a stake, such as the office of sexual harassment, peer education programs, victim services, domestic violence/rape crisis centers, court advocates, and counseling services, are funded with VAWA dollars.

In 2000, Congress reauthorized the law, expanding provisions to encompass rural, older, and immigrant women, and those with disabilities. This September, VAWA is up for reauthorization with a variety of new provisions that help redress flaws in the legislation. For example, one stipulation will extend protections for immigrant victims of violence: it will halt the deportation of victims and encourage cooperation with law enforcement without fear of retaliation against family members. A failure to reauthorize the legislation would have devastating effects on the resources available to women in communities and on campuses nationwide. By organizing around VAWA, activists can help ensure that Congress demonstrates a continuing commitment to the safety and well-being of American women.

However, it is not only U.S. women that will lose out if VAWA is not reauthorized. Because of the United States' power and influence in the global community, the nation's treatment of its female citizens has important implications for the policies and practices of other countries. If Americans do not compel Congress to make VAWA reauthorization a priority, the U.S. will not take this important step to demonstrate to the world that violence against women is unacceptable. Reauthorizing VAWA is not the only step that the U.S. should take to demonstrate its commitment to women's rights at home and abroad. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW, is a treaty that provides a universal definition of discrimination against women. CEDAW's goal is to abolish discrimination against women in political, cultural, economic, and social arenas, as well as in family life. Heralded as the “Treaty for the Rights of Women,” CEDAW seeks to end the

trafficking of women and violence against women; it promotes equality for women in public life, education, employment, health care, law, and property. Since the United Nations adopted CEDAW on December 18, 1979, 180 countries have ratified the Convention. To this day, however, the U.S. has failed to ratify the treaty, putting it in the company of a small minority of nations that include Iran, Sudan, and Somalia. By not ratifying CEDAW, the U.S. compromises its credibility as a world leader in human rights.

Take Action to End Violence Against Women

Educate Your Campus about the Importance of VAWA

Sheila Wellstone, wife of Minnesota Senator Paul Wellstone, was an activist on issues like domestic violence. Following her death, the Sheila Wellstone Institute (www.wellstone.org) was established to continue her commitment to organizing around violence against women. The Institute has designed a **VAWA Grassroots Organizing Toolkit** to help students organize around VAWA reauthorization this

September. It includes background information about the Act, and tips for organizing and outreach on campus and in the community. The kit includes information on writing letters to the editor, orchestrating a press conference, and holding public forums and town hall meetings, all with step-by-step guidelines and sample materials.

Create Student Support for U.S. Ratification of CEDAW

Amnesty International is at the forefront of speaking out against human rights abuses across the world. Their six-year-old Stop Violence Against Women Campaign (www.amnestyusa.org/stopviolence), focuses on violence against women in post-conflict situations as well as in the family and community. Their **Stop Violence Against Women Campaign Action Kit** provides helpful hints for discussing the reauthorization of VAWA and U.S. ratification of CEDAW, as well as talking points for educating your

Senators and Representatives on these issues. Additionally, they provide a variety of fact sheets, petitions, and sample letters-to-the-editor to help educate the student body about the importance of VAWA and CEDAW.

The 16 Days Campaign: Highlighting the Interconnectedness of Women's and Human Rights

Recognizing violence against women as a human rights violation, organizers of the **16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence** (www.amnestyusa.org/women/16days) have been working since 1991 to educate people about violence against women and how to eradicate it. The campaign takes place from November 25th (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to

December 10th (International Human Rights Day). This period includes many significant days such as December 1st (World AIDS Day), and December 6th, the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre (where 14 female students were killed at an engineering school by a troubled man who blamed women and feminism for his life failures). Use these action ideas to educate students about violence against women during the 16 Days.

- **Set up an informational table in a high traffic area on campus.** Download FMF fact sheets at www.feministcampus.org on “Violence Against Women on College Campuses” and “Violence Against Women: Global Issues,” as well as Amnesty International USA's fact sheets on violence against women, HIV/AIDS, and economic, social, and cultural rights at www.amnestyusa.org/.

- **Collaborate with a local DV shelter** and collect stories from women in the community who have experienced violence. One campus group educated students by typing up the stories and putting copies in women's shoes placed around campus.
- **Organize a book club** featuring a book that confronts violence against women, such as *In The Time of The Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez. This book is based on the true story of three sisters who spoke out against the brutal, oppressive regime of General Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, and paid the ultimate price for their courage. Your group can also screen the 2001 film version.
- **Arrange to have a local group give free or low-cost self-defense courses** in conjunction with a guest speaker on how you can work with Campus Police to improve campus safety procedures.
- **Collaborate with other student organizations** to host an educational forum; for example, collaborate with an Asian student organization on a speaker panel about trafficking and the sex trade in Southeast Asia.