

# International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

## History of the Day

Previously, 25 November was observed in Latin America and a growing number of other countries around the world as "International Day Against Violence Against Women". With no standard title, it was also referred to as "No Violence Against Women Day" and the "Day to End Violence Against Women". It was first declared by the first Feminist Encuentro for Latin America and the Caribbean held in Bogota, Colombia (18 to 21 July 1981). At that Encuentro women systematically denounced gender violence from domestic battery, to rape and sexual harassment, to state violence including torture and abuses of women political prisoners. The date was chosen to commemorate the lives of the Mirabal sisters. It originally marked the day that the three Mirabal sisters from the Dominican Republic were violently assassinated in 1960 during the Trujillo dictatorship (Rafael Trujillo 1930-1961). The day was used to pay tribute to the Mirabal sisters, as well as global recognition of gender violence.

## The Mirabal Sisters

The three sisters, Patria, Minerva, and Maria Teresa were born to Enrique Mirabal and Maria Mercedes Reyes (Chea) in 1924, 1927 and 1935 respectively in the Cibas region of the Dominican Republic. All three were educated in the Dominican Republic, Minerva and Maria Teresa going on to achieve university degrees.

All three sisters and their husbands became involved in activities against the Trujillo regime. The Mirabal sisters were political activists and highly visible symbols of resistance to Trujillo's dictatorship. As a result, the sisters and their families were constantly persecuted for their outspoken as well as clandestine activities against the State. Over the course of their political activity, the women and their husbands were repeatedly imprisoned at different stages. Minerva herself was imprisoned on four occasions. Despite Trujillo's persecution, the sisters still continued to actively participate in political activities against the leadership. In January 1960, Patria took charge of a meeting that eventually established the Clandestine Movement of 14 June 1960 of which all the sisters participated. When this plot against the tyranny failed, the sisters and their comrades in the Clandestine Resistance Movement were persecuted throughout the country.

In early November 1960, Trujillo declared that his two problems were the Church and the Mirabal sisters. On 25 November 1960, the sisters were assassinated in an "accident" as they were being driven to visit their husbands who were in prison. The accident caused much public outcry, and shocked and enraged the nation. The brutal assassination of the Mirabal sisters was one of the events that helped propel the anti-Trujillo movement, and within a year, the Trujillo dictatorship came to an end.

The sisters, referred to as the "Inolvidables Mariposas", the "Unforgettable Butterflies" have become a symbol against victimization of women. They have become the symbol of both popular and feminist resistance. They have been commemorated in poems, songs and books. Their execution inspired a fictional account "In the Time of the Butterflies" on the young lives of the sisters written by Julia Alvarez. It describes their suffering and martyrdom in the last days of the Trujillo dictatorship. The memory of the Mirabal sisters and their struggle for freedom and respect for human rights for all has transformed them into symbols of dignity and inspiration. They are symbols against prejudice and stereotypes, and their lives raised the spirits of all those they encountered and later, after their death, not only those in the Dominican Republic but others around the world.

## Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence came out of the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights. In June 1991, the Centre for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) with participants of the first Women's Global Institute on Women, Violence and Human Rights, a forum involving 23 women from 20 countries called for a global campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. The campaign would highlight the connections between women, violence, and human rights from 25 November to 10 December 1991. The time period encompassed four significant dates: 25 November, the International Day Against Violence Against Women; 1 December, World AIDS Day; 6 December, the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre, when 14 women engineering students were gunned down for being feminists; and 10 December, Human Rights Day.

Coordinated by the Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2000 marks the tenth annual campaign, and is observed globally by activities at the local, national, regional and international levels. Activities include radio, television and video programming; press conferences; film screenings; workshops, seminars, panels and other meetings; demonstrations, protests, marches and vigils; photo, poster, art and book exhibitions; lectures, debates, testimonies and talks; petition drives; public education campaigns; concerts, plays and other theatre performances; street dramas and other community programmes; distribution of posters, stickers, leaflets, information kits and other publications;

The tenth anniversary of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign is inspired by the strength and commitment of the movement that works tirelessly to eliminate gender-based violence in the home and in the world. Over the years, the 16 Days network has multiplied and now includes participation from more than 800 organizations in over 90 countries. The growth of the Campaign exceeded initial expectations - not just in the numbers of those participating but also in spirit. The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence has become an annual event in many towns, states and regions. Women's human rights activists have used this

16-day period to create a solidarity movement which raises awareness around gender-based violence, works to ensure better protection for survivors of violence and calls for its elimination. The 16 Days solidarity network welcomes those who join the campaign annually by coordinating activities in their own regions.

The organizing strategies employed by groups during the Campaign vary and are reflective of the region and its current political situation. In 2000, the Center urged that organizations link to global events such as the recent five-year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing +5) and the upcoming World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (31 August - 7 September 2001 in South Africa) to pressure local and national governments to implement promises made and increase their commitment to women's human rights in the future. The Center encourages activists to use this 16-day period to raise awareness in student, local, national and regional communities by coordinating events such as tribunals, workshops, festivals, etc.

### Third Committee Action

On 19 October 1999, at the 17th meeting of the Third Committee during the 54th session of the General Assembly, the representative of the Dominican Republic on behalf of itself and 74 Member States introduced a draft resolution (document A/C.3/54/L.14) calling for the designation of 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

The matter was taken up again at the 30th meeting of the Third Committee on 3 November 1999, when the Committee had before it a revised draft resolution entitled "International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women" (document A/C.3/54/L.14/Rev.1), by which the

Assembly would decide to designate 25 November as that International Day. The draft was sponsored by 79 States.

By the text on the International Day, the General Assembly would invite worldwide organization of activities on that day to raise public awareness of the problem of violence against women. The draft expressed alarm that endemic violence against women was impeding women's opportunities to achieve legal, social, political and economic equality in society. The Assembly would reiterate that the term "violence against women" would refer to acts capable of causing physical, sexual or psychological harm, whether in public or private life.

The Third Committee approved the draft resolution without a vote, in which the date of 25 November would be designated the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

#### General Assembly Action

On 17 December 1999, the General Assembly at its 83rd plenary meeting of the fifty-fourth session, on the basis of the Report of the Third Committee (A/54/598 and Corr. 1 and 2), adopted Resolution 54/134 on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

#### Resolution 54/134. International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

The General Assembly,

Recalling the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, and its resolution 52/86 of 12 December 1997, entitled "Crime prevention and criminal justice measures to eliminate violence against women",

Rights,<sup>2</sup> the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,

Taking note of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women adopted by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States at its twenty-fourth regular session, held in Belém, Brazil, from 6 to 10 June 1994, and general recommendation 19 on violence against women adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its eleventh session,

Concerned that violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace, as recognized in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which recommended a set of integral measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women, and to the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Concerned also that some groups of women, such as women belonging to minority groups, indigenous women, refugee women, migrant women, women living in rural or remote communities, destitute women, women in institutions or in detention, the girl child, women with disabilities, elderly women and women in situations of armed conflict, are especially vulnerable to violence,

Recognizing that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of their full advancement, and that violence against

women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into subordinate positions, compared with men,

Recognizing also that the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights, and recognizing further the need to promote and protect all human rights of women and girls,

Alarmed that women do not fully enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and concerned about the long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms in relation to violence against women,

Recognizing with satisfaction the cooperation provided by the relevant agencies, bodies, funds and organs of the United Nations system to different countries in the fight to eradicate violence against women, in fulfilment of their respective mandates,

Recognizing the efforts made by civil society and non-governmental organizations that have contributed to creating a worldwide social conscience of the negative impact, both on social and on economic life, of violence against women,

Reiterating that, according to article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life,

1. Decides to designate 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women;

2. Invites, as appropriate, Governments, the relevant agencies, bodies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations, to organize on that day activities designed to raise public awareness of the problem of violence against women.