"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. 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.

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).

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

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

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