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INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN
for the Elimination of Violence
Against Women • 2008

TRADE UNIONS
SAY
NO
TO VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN
AND GIRLS

Preamble

This brochure provides tools and guidelines to strengthen and reinforce trade union policies and actions to STOP Violence Against Women. Each year the ITUC in cooperation with the Global Union Federations (GUFs) plans initiatives and activities to place this topic high on the agenda of trade unions, employers and governments.

25 November, United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, is an ideal opportunity for a collective and united trade union response in which we say NO to violence against women. Violence against women must be wiped out in our homes, societies and the workplace if women are to have equal opportunities to access Decent Work and a Decent Life.

Introduction

Violence against women and girls is perhaps the most socially tolerated of human rights violations. It prevents women and girls from enjoying their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Violence against women is a worldwide problem that affects women of all ages, ethnicities, races, nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds. It cuts across lines of income, class and culture.

Some forms of violence are gender-based and impact women disproportionately, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and human trafficking. Around the world, social, economic, political and religious forces impact women's human rights in different ways. These violations may include forced and early marriages, female genital mutilation, honour killings, dowry-related violence, rape and rape as a weapon of war, female infanticide, and enforced sterilisation.



There is a growing awareness that domestic violence is also a workplace issue. Domestic violence will necessarily effect woman's ability to do her work and her attendance record.

There is equally a growing awareness that violence at work is not merely an individual problem but a structural, systemic problem rooted in wider social, economic, organisational and cultural factors. The power imbalance in the workplace and the precarious employment conditions of numerous women increase their risk of being victims of sexual harassment, abuse and rape which also raises the risk of HIV/AIDS infection. Certain types of work situations increase this threat, such as women who travel for their work or who migrate to find work and women domestic workers.



Gender-based violence in schools, often in the form of sexual violence, harassment and bullying, persists in all countries, including from home to school and vice-versa. It represents a generalised violation of human rights and an obstacle to access, retention and success in the school system, particularly of girls.

Violence against women: a major cause of death and disability - Facts and figures

- One out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime - with the abuser usually someone known to her. Out of ten countries surveyed in a 2005 study by the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 50% of women in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Tanzania reported having been subjected to physical or sexual violence by intimate partners.
- Women aged 15 - 44 are more at risk of death and disability through domestic violence than through cancer, motor accidents, war and malaria.



Women living in poverty are more likely to experience violence. 60%-70% of the world poor and working poor are women! Economic development strategies should aim for decent, productive work for all.

Women and Armed Conflict

Violence against women in conflict zones is often an extension of the gender discrimination that already exists in peacetime. In armed conflicts raging around the globe, soldiers and paramilitaries terrorise women with rape, sexual and other physical violence, and harassment. These tactics are tools of war, instruments of terror designed to hurt and punish women. Women in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Iraq, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and in other countries have experienced brutal rapes, sexual assaults, sexual slavery and mutilation.



Several studies have revealed increasing links between violence against women and HIV/AIDS: a survey among 1,366 South African women showed that women who were beaten by their partners were 48% more likely to be infected with HIV than those who were not.

Violence against women in the media

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2005, a global research project documenting the participation and portrayal of men and women in news media, found that women are twice as likely as men to be portrayed as victim in the news: 19% of female news subjects, compared with 8% of males are portrayed in this way. News reporting on sexual violence and domestic violence comes far down the news agenda. Indeed, these topics attract much less coverage than stories about accidents and disasters or standard crime news (robbery, assault, murder and so on).

25 November UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

In 1999 the United Nations officially designated 25 November as the **International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women** (resolution 54/134).

This followed on from a **1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women**, in which the UN General Assembly identified “a need for commitment by the international community at large to the elimination of violence against women.” The 1993 Declaration is the first international human rights instrument to exclusively and explicitly address the issue of violence against women. It affirms that the phenomenon violates, impairs or nullifies women’s human rights and their exercise of fundamental freedoms.

The Declaration provides a definition of gender-based abuse, calling it “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”.

International instruments to enforce government laws

The United Nations treaties, conventions and other instruments address abuses of human and workers’ rights in the area of trafficking, labour rights abuses and the use of rape as a war crime. These international instruments can be used to enforce government laws, policies and practices.



Check if your government has ratified or signed and adequately implemented the listed international instruments:

- **ILO Conventions:** 29 on Forced Labour and 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation
- **CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.** In 1992, the **Committee** on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted **General Recommendation 19** which explains that the

prohibition of gender based discrimination includes violence. State parties to CEDAW must take all the necessary measures to eliminate violence, including legal sanctions, civil remedies, preventative measures, (such as public information and education campaigns) and protective measures (such as support services for victims).

- **DEVAW - Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women**

was adopted by a UN General Assembly resolution in 1993. While the Declaration does not create legally binding obligations for States, it does represent a clear consensus that “violence against women constitutes a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women”. The Declaration explains 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 the full advancement of women.” The declaration emphasises the obligation of the State to ensure prevention, investigation and punishment of all perpetrators, minimising the distinction between public and private actors.

- **The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, calls upon governments to take action to address critical areas of concern, among them violence against women. It states, “Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms in the case of violence against women is a matter of concern to all States and should be addressed. The Beijing Platform for Action also requires all governments to develop strategies or national plans of action to implement the Platform locally. The National Plans of Action for each country outline specific activities that the national governments will undertake to improve the situation of women, including addressing violence against women.

- **The Millennium Development Goals and violence against women**

The MDG targets will be missed if violence against women is not addressed. Preventing violence against women will contribute to achieving the MDGs which commits the international community to an action agenda which emphasises

sustainable, human development as the key to fulfilling social and economic progress. All 191 Member States of the United Nations have pledged to achieve these goals by the year 2015.

- **Other UN Conventions**

- UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriage
- UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women
- UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
- UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Trapped into forced labour and trafficking

- The ILO estimates that women and girls represent 56% of victims of forced economic exploitation.
- Each year 2 million girls between ages 5 and 15 are introduced into the commercial sex market.
- Regarding forced commercial sexual exploitation, an overwhelming majority (98%) are women and girls.
- Women who are most vulnerable to being trafficked are those aged 10-35 and who are impoverished, uneducated or from indigenous, ethnic minority, rural or refugee groups.
- Many sources refer to the trafficking of young people with unspecified age. However, based on available data, the ILO estimates that children under 18 represent between 40% and 50% of all the victims of forced labour.

Decent Work, Decent Life for Women Campaign and the 16 Days of Action against Gender-based Violence

On 8 March 2008 the ITUC in cooperation with the Global Union Federations launched the Decent Work, Decent Life for Women Campaign (more than 90 national centres in 60 countries are currently taking part in this Campaign).

One of the key dates for action is 25 November. The ITUC and the GUFs will be involved in 16 Days of Action against Gender Violence, running from 25 November to 10 December, International Human Rights Day. It emphasises that violence against women is a human rights violation. The Campaign is an organising strategy around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women. Activities can range from media programmes to demonstrations, conferences, exhibitions and performances.

Check the ITUC – Equality web page for the latest updates on the Campaign and for the **Campaign poster and guide**: www.ituc-csi.org or order a copy from equality@ituc-csi.org.

National plans of action to stop violence against women

According to the UN Secretary-General's *In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women*, by 2006, 89 States had some form of legislative prohibition on domestic violence, including 60 States with specific domestic violence laws, and a growing number of countries had instituted national plans of action to end violence against women. This is a clear increase in comparison to 2003. Then only 45 countries had specific laws on domestic violence. Yet high levels of violence against women persist.

Tips for strengthening trade union policies and actions

Violence against women persists because of the lack or inadequate implementation of laws. Despite the obligation of States to act, violence against women and girls in many societies is met with government silence or apathy or lack of interest.



Trade Unions should put pressure on and convince their governments that they have a responsibility under international human rights law to:

- **take action to address the causes of domestic abuse and to improve the services on offer to the victims**
- **Prevent, investigate and punish acts of all forms of violence against women whether in the home, workplace, the community or society, in custody or in situations of armed conflict.**
- **Take all measures to empower women.**
- **Condemn violence against women and not invoke customs, traditions or practices in the name of religion or culture to avoid their obligations to eliminate violence against women.**
- **Develop and/or utilise legislative, educational, social and other measures aimed at the prevention of violence against women.**
- **introduce or strengthen laws to give adequate protection and redress to victims of domestic abuse.**



Domestic violence is a workplace issue that can cause increased absenteeism, poor timekeeping and deterioration in a worker's performance.

Working in an Export Processing Zone

Violence and psychological abuse are an integral part of daily working life for millions of EPZ workers. Production costs are kept to an absolute minimum and working conditions can be close to slavery. Working hours are long, discipline firm and the pace of work unbearable. In addition to the pregnancy tests, and dismissal for those who are pregnant, women workers are often the target of sexual intimidation, beatings, constant verbal abuse, close surveillance including invasion of their personal privacy, and arbitrary financial and physical punishment.



Employers must take the necessary precautions to protect the health and safety of their employees at the workplace. This includes, notably, protecting workers from the risk of violence at work. **As trade union organisations we have a duty to be vigilant and to demand, particularly by means of collective agreements, that employers:**

- evaluate the risk of violence and ensure constant monitoring to determine potential sources of violence and verify the enterprise's state of readiness to react to it;
- implement effective programmes to prevent violence in the workplace, be it verbal, physical, psychological or sexual, establishing a system where incidents of violence can be reported in confidence and appropriate disciplinary measures applied;
- provide workers with training on the key elements of an anti-violence programme;
- ensure that the workplace has a sexual harassment policy that takes into account the diversity of women workers.

What can trade unions do?

- **Negotiate policies that recognise domestic violence as a workplace issue. Such policies should provide for effective support and assistance, including confidential counselling.**
- **Provide emergency support, including financial aid and/or other assistance for members who are victims of domestic violence.**
- **Campaign about and raise awareness of the issue of domestic violence and how to obtain help for the victims; organise marches and rallies on 25 November in co-ordination with other trade unions and women's NGOs.**
- **Build links with NGOs campaigning on the issue.**
- **Negotiate policies that prohibit sexual harassment, bullying and violence in the workplace (see ITUC publication: Stopping sexual harassment at work: A Trade Union Guide).**
- **Encourage anti-violence programmes specifically addressed to combating violence at work.**
- **Review disciplinary procedures to ensure that they deal adequately with the issue of violence.**
- **Develop safe reporting procedures for violent incidents that offer adequate protection for the victim.**
- **Ensure that those responsible for receiving and investigating reports of violence are properly trained to handle them with appropriate sensitivity.**
- **Make sure that violence in the workplace is on the health and safety agenda.**

Tools and resources

- Decent Work, Decent Life for Women Campaign:
<http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?rubrique198>
- ITUC publication: Stopping sexual harassment at work: A trade Union Guide
http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Harcelement_ENG_12pgs_BR.pdf
or order copies: equality@ituc-csi.org
- ILO Conventions: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm>
- UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>.
Recommendation 19:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/>
- DEVAW - Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women:
<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action :
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>
- The Millennium Development Goals: <http://www.mdgender.net/goals/>
- UNIFEM links violence against women to gender inequality. Documents to raise awareness and promote action to stop violence against women are in: [ara | chi | esp | fra | rus \]](http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/vaw/toolkit.php#fra) <http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/vaw/toolkit.php#fra>
- The Rights of the Child UNICEF <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>
- **Other United Nations agencies** like UNIFEM, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provide information, statistics, news briefs, and updates on the situation globally.