

16  
DAYS

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
November 25th to December 10th, 2005

## WOMEN'S VOICES

It took a while for women's voices- represented by organization throughout Latin American and the Caribbean- to be heard. However, once they were, they made gender-based violence not only an issue addressed by specific legislation, but also gained recognition for what it really is: a public health problem that concerns women's human rights, citizenship, governance, and development.

Since the 1960s, the impacts that domestic and sexual violence have had on women's human rights has been made visible through the political and social actions of women. Their perseverance began to see results in the nineties, when various countries in the region opened the debate on bills concerning violence against women, culminating the decade with the majority of these laws being passed..

Nevertheless, the women's movement knows that a phenomenon like gender violence, that has multiple causes, should also be confronted comprehensively, and that laws alone are not enough. In this context, the appearance of the HIV threat and the AIDS epidemic, has further complicated the issue, forcing organizations to re-create, reformulate, and launch a series of new initiatives to prevent its causes. The links between violence against women and HIV infection, have been brought to the forefront by these groups, who at the same time have implemented numerous projects to prevent the causes. A few out of the hundreds of examples carried out in the region will be mentioned below.

### The Formula: Campaigns, Projects, and Enthusiasm

"*Somos Diferentes Somos Iguales*" (We are Different, We are the Same – SDSI), is a project of the **Foundation *Puntos de Encuentro***, a non-governmental Nicaraguan organization that promotes the rights of adolescents and youth in everyday life. They train youth leaders and communicators through the use of their "*Sexto Sentido*" television series, and their "*Sexto Sentido Radio*" radio programme, and they are also responsible for the coordination of care centres and local and national media. The Foundation seeks to promote a more favourable environment for adolescents and youth, thus enabling them to have more control over their own lives. Included in this, is being able to live a life free from violence and discrimination.

*Puntos de Encuentro* is currently working fully on the campaign *Necesitamos poder hablar*. This is an educational package that, together with a Guide and a DVD, form a methodological package for use in workshops focused on '*machismo*' as a risk factor and its' direct relationship to HIV-AIDS and sexual abuse.

The Guide contains: *Punto de Encuentro's* conceptual framework related to '*machismo*,' HIV/AIDS and sexual abuse; summaries of videos of the "*Sexto Sentido*" television programme, with ideas on topics for group work, like a Methodological Guide for Workshops; and information on how to prevent these problems, and to accompany and support persons who are experiencing them; among other material.

The SDSI Project works on topics such as: health and sexual and reproductive rights; sexuality (negotiations in sexual relationships, sexual identity/orientation, safe sex, the use of condoms, emergency contraceptive methods, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases); intra-family and gender-based violence, and sexual abuse; human rights; poverty and migration; social exclusion; drugs; among others.

(<http://www.puntos.org.ni/institucion/proyecto.php>)

FOR THE HEALTH OF WOMEN, FOR THE HEALTH OF THE WORLD: NO MORE VIOLENCE!

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- ▶ *Puntos de Encuentro* is organizing a Central American Meeting for organizations and entities that work with sexual and reproductive rights, with a gender and generational focus. A provisory date is October 26th in Nicaragua.

At the same time, three organization of the region, **FEIM of Argentina**, **Punto de Encuentro de la Comunidad, A.C.**, of Mexico, and **Flora Tristán of Perú** –together with 16 groups and networks around the world, are sponsoring a follow-up of the Millenium Development Goal achievements. This initiative is based on a declaration that more that 25 national and international organizations presented on March 8th, 2004, to the United Nations Secretariat of the Commission on the Status of Women. The declaration stressed that the reproductive health of HIV infected women was not being cared for.

Building on this declaration, four organizations - Ipas, the *Comunidad Internacional de Mujeres Viviendo con HIV/SIDA* (The Internacional Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS – ICW), the Pacific Institute for Women’s Health, and the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) - developed a practical guide to help address these areas. By linking particular questions to the Development Objectives, these organizations seek to collect, once a year, relatively comparable data from different countries and regions. The objective is to present this data in national and international forum’s where HIV/AIDS policies and programmes are formulated and reviewed.

- ▶ Two of the United Nations Millennium Goals are directly related to the reproductive health of HIV infected women. The objective of Goal 5 is to reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio, while Goal 6 seeks to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

According to these organizations, the neglected areas include, among others, the need to assure that HIV infected women and their support networks be involved, as much in the policy design, as in the implementation of reproductive health care programs. Also proposed, is the increased access to prophylaxis after exposure to unprotected sex, including sexual violence, as a method for the reduction of HIV transmission.

([http://www.ipas.org/publications/es/RRHIV\\_S04\\_es.pdf](http://www.ipas.org/publications/es/RRHIV_S04_es.pdf))

In mid-October 2005, an Alliance for a National Response on HIV/AIDS and Gender was formed in the **Dominican Republic** by official bodies, civil society and persons living with HIV.

“This commitment constitutes a step forward in the national response to the epidemic and a recognition that society is increasingly conscious about the fact that when women’s human rights and dignity are not respected, society creates and enhances women’s vulnerability to HIV,” expressed representatives of the **Women and Health Collective**, the promoting organization. This group specializes in sexual and reproductive rights; domestic, emotional, physical and sexual violence; and regularly looks at the links between violence against women and HIV/AIDS.

(<http://mujereshoy.com/secciones/3404.shtml>)

## Co-ordinations, Contests and Media

In collaboration with its member organizations and individuals, the **Latin American and Caribbean Women and Health Network**, launches a campaign every year to raise public awareness around a specific issue for the International Day of Action for Women’s Health (May 28th). The Network distributes various publications in countries of the region, and supports and participates in permanent campaigns, including the Global Campaign for the Development of Microbicides. They also carry out research on diverse topics related to women’s health, and HIV/AIDS, among others.

(<http://www.reddesalud.org/espanol/>)

In Mexico, the organization Information and Communication on Women, **CIMAC**, is participating in the 2005 joint venture project of the City of Mexico's Secretariat for Social Development. CIMAC participates in the promotion of information that gives visibility to the violation of women's human rights, including violence against women based only on the fact that they are women.

In this way, through the concept "Social Communication professionals: for a violence-free life for women", CIMAC seeks to train and sensitize journalists from 16 political delegations of Mexico city out of the necessity to build a journalistic vision that helps women to lead a life free from violence. To that end, CIMAC is organizing a series of activities for the social communications professionals and directors of the Units on Family Violence (UAVIF) about violence against women and human rights. (<http://www.cimac.org.mx/cursopyg.html>)

CIMAC is promoting the First Contest for Social Communication Journalists for a Life Free from Violence for Women. Spokeswomen from the institution stated: "We will involve the 16 political delegations to promote this contest, and recognize the efforts of social communication professionals over the past three years towards performing this task: to make known that family violence is a crime, and that women have the right to live free from violence."

► Likewise, the **Latin International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW)** is developing the project "Advocacy in the Mass Media of Social Communication", as a way of promoting the coverage of the "Women and AIDS" issue on a regular basis on the radio, on television, in print and on Internet, not only in the health section, but also in other sections, such as entertainment, general information, and culture.

In order to achieve this objective, a call was made to Latin American Journalists to join the initiative. The goal is to establish the importance of the issue by making contact with women journalists and women leaders in the media, as well as with other media specializing in topics dealing with women and AIDS. At the same time, they look to spark the interest of Journalism and Social Communication students.

(<http://www.mujereshoy.com/secciones/2999.shtml>)

### Meetings, Awards, and Ingenuity

Recognition has not been forgotten. The **Women's Information Network of Argentina (RIMA)** disseminates information on a permanent basis in the city of Rosario, and throughout Argentina, through the use of radio, print or Internet in their commitment to the fight for women's human rights.

On March 8th 2005, RIMA received the Juana Manso award from the Women's Division of the Social Development Secretariat of the Municipality of Rosario. The award is given to journalists and electronic media in this city that promote a non-stereotypical image of women, who at the same time promote non-sexist language. This is all part of the effort to eliminate violence against women. (<http://www.rimaweb.com.ar/rimaweb/premios.html>)

Many regional meetings have also taken place. One of such meetings was held in Buenos Aires in November of 2004, gathering 60 women living with AIDS from 17 Latin American countries. Not only did the meeting review national and regional strategies to fight the social impacts of this disease, but it also promoted training activities for Latin American delegates on human rights advocacy techniques for their application in everyday life.

In the meeting, women participated from: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. This activity was a part of a cooperation agreement between the Ford

Foundation and the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Secretariat of the International Community of Women Living with HIV-AIDS (ICW-LAC) to fight against this disease.

(<http://www.mujereshoy.com/secciones/2558.shtml>)

The issue also permeates the cultural sphere. On September 18<sup>th</sup> 2005, the **Platform of Women Artists against Gender-based Violence** organized a concert in Mexico city to denounce the hundreds of women murdered over the last decade in Ciudad Juárez, in the State of Chihuahua.

Manu Chao, Alejandro Sanz, Alex Ubago, Julieta Venegas and Lila Downs, among other artists, participated in this free concert that was celebrated in the historic Zócalo (main plaza) in the Mexican capital, and that was presented a week later in Ciudad Juárez, a city on the Mexico-United States border, where over 300 women have been murdered since the beginning of the nineties.

(<http://www.mujereshoy.com/secciones/2363.shtml>)

There are also important examples of ingenious initiatives. Jamileth Mendieta is the director of the **Radio Station *Palabra de Mujer***, whose main office is in Paiwas, Nicaragua. Mendieta started the radio station together with a local feminist organization three years ago. In terms of information, one of the radio station's strengths is their coverage of baseball, which in Nicaragua is as important as soccer is in other Latin American countries.

"We know that men listen; and for this reason we broadcast messages on domestic violence and rape between slots," says Mendieta. Each morning a character called "the Witch Messenger" entertains listeners with denunciations against husbands who batter their wives or fathers that spend the money for the basic family consumption basket in local bars. The effects of the public exposure of violent men have been astonishing.

(<http://www.mujereshoy.com/secciones/3220.shtml>)

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