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THE INTERNATIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (I-VAWA)

Every year, violence devastates the lives of millions of women and girls. Violence against women and girls is a global epidemic and a human rights violation occurring daily. It includes physical, sexual and psychological violence, and harmful practices such as rape, “honor killings”, female genital cutting, and human trafficking. The United Nations Development Fund for Women estimates that at least one in every three women globally has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, with rates reaching 70 percent in some countries. Violence against women destabilizes countries, impedes economic progress, and prevents women from contributing to their community, and creating better lives for themselves and their families.

The International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA) makes ending violence against women and girls a top U.S. diplomatic priority. In August 2012, the U.S. government released its first ever *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally*. The Strategy is largely derived from and has long been a core component of the I-VAWA and requires federal agencies engaged in foreign assistance work to undertake measurable steps in their programming to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and to be coordinated in these efforts.

In 2013, the I-VAWA will ensure that the U.S. government implements the Strategy to reduce violence against women and girls in at least 5 countries where it is severe. The bill supports measures to prevent violence, protect survivors and bring perpetrators to justice. It contains best practice provisions for preventing and responding to violence against women during times of peace and times of conflict. The legislation was developed by Amnesty International USA, Futures Without Violence, and Women Thrive Worldwide with input from more than 40 international and 150 U.S. based groups with relevant expertise. The bill was introduced during the 110th, 111th, 112th, and 113th Congresses. Rep. Jan Schakowsky reintroduced I-VAWA in November 2013 with Reps. Eliot Engel, Chris Gibson, Richard Hanna, Nita Lowey, and Debbie Wasserman Schultz joining her as original sponsors.

Specifically, I-VAWA would:

- Address violence against women and girls comprehensively by supporting health, legal, economic, and humanitarian assistance sectors and incorporating violence prevention and response into such programs.
- Alleviate poverty and increase the cost effectiveness of foreign assistance by investing in women.
- Support survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and prevent violence.
- Codify and implement the *U.S Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally* in five select countries which have a high incidence of violence against women.
- Permanently authorize the Office of Global Women’s Issues in the State Department, as well as the position of the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, who is responsible for coordinating activities, policies, programs, and funding relating to gender integration and women’s empowerment internationally, including those intended to prevent and respond to violence against women.
- Enable the U.S. government to develop a faster and more efficient response to violence against women in humanitarian emergencies and conflict-related situations.
- Build the effectiveness of overseas non-governmental organizations – particularly women’s non-governmental organizations – in addressing violence against women.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ✓ U.S. Representatives should co-sponsor I-VAWA, H.R. 3571.
- ✓ U.S. Senators should co-sponsor I-VAWA upon introduction.

Amnesty International is a grassroots organization with 2.8 million members worldwide working to promote and defend human rights. For information, contact Julia Drost at 202-675-8758 or jdrost@aiusa.org, or visit www.aiusa.org/act4ivawa.