

INTERNATIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (IVAWA)

Around the world women face violence in many horrifying forms: rape, domestic violence, sexual violence during armed conflicts or in refugee settings, genital mutilation, forced and child marriage, "honor" killings, dowry-related violence, and human trafficking. According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 3 of the world's women will experience violence in her lifetime, with rates reaching 70% in some countries. Around the globe 1 woman in 5 will be the victim of rape or attempted rape. The United Nations estimates that at least 5,000 "honor" killings take place each year around the world and more than 130,000,000 girls and young women worldwide have been subjected to genital mutilation. A ground-breaking report issued by the United Nations Secretary-General found that 102 member states have no specific laws on domestic violence.

Statistics such as these demonstrate that violence against women and girls is a devastating and persistent truth in every country, in every community, and among every social demographic. Senator Biden believes it's time to tackle the violence.

Not surprisingly, violence against women and girls has a profound impact on the health and development of countries worldwide. Violence breeds poverty. It impedes economic development because it can prevent girls from going to school, or stop women from holding jobs or inheriting property, or shut down access to critical health care for themselves and their children. We can't eradicate poverty and disease unless we prevent and respond to the violence women face in their own homes and communities. And we cannot truly empower women to become active in civic life and promote peace, prosperity and democracy unless they personally are free from fear of violence.

The International Violence Against Women Act has three main components. First, the bill reorganizes and rejuvenates the gender-related efforts of the State Department by creating one central office – the "Office for Women's Global Initiatives", directed by a Senate-confirmed Ambassador who reports directly to the Secretary. The Coordinator will be charged with monitoring, coordinating, and organizing all U.S. resources, programs and aid abroad that deals with gender-based violence. In this time of limited resources, we must make every effort to use U.S. taxpayer funds efficiently by coordinating existing and new efforts in a manner that amplifies their effect and sustainability.

Second, the International Violence Against Women Act mandates creation of a 5-year, comprehensive strategy, with coordinated programming, to prevent and respond to violence against women in 10 to 20 targeted countries. The Act creates a dedicated funding stream of \$175 million a year to support programs dealing with violence against women in five areas: the criminal and civil justice system (everything from drafting laws on domestic violence, to enhancing women's access to property and inheritance

rights, to reforming police practices), health care, girls' access to education and school safety, women's economic empowerment, and public awareness campaigns that change social norms.

Finally, as the recent reports from the Congo make tragically clear, in situations of humanitarian crises, conflict and post-conflict operations, women and girls are vulnerable to horrific acts of violence. Reports of refugee women being raped while collecting firewood, soldiers sexually abusing girls in exchange for token food items, or women subjected to unimaginable brutality and torture as a tactic of war are shocking in number and inhumanity. The Act requires training, reporting mechanisms and other emergency measures for those who are working directly with or protecting refugees and other vulnerable populations.

The International Violence Against Women Act was drafted with the insight and expertise of over 100 nongovernmental organizations and 40 women's groups around the globe, including American Refugee Committee, Amnesty International, CARE, Christian Children's Fund, Family Violence Prevention Fund, Global AIDS Alliance, Human Rights Watch, Inter-Agency Gender Working Group (IGWG), International Rescue Committee, International Justice Mission, Women's Edge Coalition, Vital Voices Global Partnership and many others.

We've made tremendous progress in reducing violence against women here in the United States since we passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994. That important work continues. But we cannot ignore the devastation wrought by violence in every corner of the globe. Now is the time to turn our attention to women in other parts of the world – women whose lives are devastated by poverty, political and civic exclusion, disease, and violence. Gender-based violence contributes to the poverty, inequality and instability that threaten peace and democracy. Addressing it isn't just moral; it's also smart foreign policy.

Over the past thirty years, the understanding of human rights and violence against women has metamorphosed. A state's responsibility to protect women from violence has evolved - what was once seen largely as a private, family or cultural matter is now understood by the international community as a violation of basic human rights. Violence against women is a legal wrong. It cannot be excused or justified or ignored. It is an engrained social norm but one that we can dismantle over time – one woman at a time – with patience, creativity and sustained political will. The International Violence Against Women Act is the first step.