A Great Step Forward to Stop the Epidemic of Violence Against Women and Girls

The International Violence Against Women Act would for the first time place gender-based violence at the center of the U.S. foreign policy and international aid agenda. The Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls Globally is pushing Congress to reintroduce and pass this vital legislation in 2013.

Around the world, with sickening frequency we hear about another instance of violence against a girl or woman. A five-year-old is raped in India. A girl is shot in the head in Pakistan on her way to school. Twenty six women are sexually assaulted by police in San Salvador Atenco, Mexico. A women’s rights advocate in Afghanistan is murdered in the street.

Violence against women and girls is one of the world’s most pervasive human rights abuses and a tremendous and costly problem. The United Nations estimates that one in every three women will experience violence at some point in her life with rates reaching up to 70% in some countries. Women and girls fall prey to sex traffickers, are attacked as they attend school, endure brutality in the home, or are raped in conflict zones.

From Afghanistan and Mexico to India and Egypt, violence against women destabilizes families and communities, blocks economic progress, and undermines women’s efforts to create better lives for themselves and their families.

The terrible consequences of this epidemic of violence rob countries of the contributions and talent of half their populations. Violence takes the lives of millions of women and girls, and denies countless others their dignity and their right to live safe, productive lives. No country is immune. Violence crosses all national borders and affects women of all ages, social groups, religions, and economic, racial and ethnic groups.

Consider “Connie” from Nicaragua, whose father physically abused her for years, then started raping her from age nine, sometimes preventing her from going to school. If passed, the International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA) would make gender-based violence prevention and response a lens through which U.S. government foreign aid is evaluated with the goal of using aid to respond to and ultimately reduce levels of violence. So, for example, health care providers would be trained to recognize signs of violence and know how to lend support to girls like Connie. It would mean, as another example, that the U.S. Agency for International Development would assist in putting protections in place to ensure that girls can go to school safely. And, it would mean resources to help organizations that are working to change the attitudes of men and boys about violence.

Investing in women makes sense because when women and girls thrive, societies are more likely to prosper, reduce rates of HIV and AIDS, decrease child and maternal mortality, and increase participatory and democratic governments—all of which makes U.S. assistance dollars go farther. U.S. security—and the security of all countries—is only enhanced when the status of women is elevated. So addressing violence against women is crucial to global development and stability, and by extension, to U.S. security.

Working through the international assistance that the U.S. already provides to countries around the world, this bill will support best practices against violence so that authorities can bring perpetrators to justice and women and girls can go to school, earn an income, and collect food or water without fear of rape.

Last year, the U.S. government took a step to help millions of women and girls by releasing its first ever U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally. This comprehensive strategy improves existing aid programs with the goal of helping to prevent and reduce violence against women. This effort must be sustained through passage of the International Violence Against Women Act. I ask [your Member of Congress] to support the bill and ask [his and her] colleagues to do the same.

Supporting the International Violence Against Women Act is in the United States’ interests as well as being the right thing to do. We must all make our voices heard. Tell lawmakers to do more to stop violence against women and girls across the globe.
To the Editor:

From Afghanistan and Mexico to India and Egypt, violence against women and girls is one of the world’s most pervasive human rights abuses and a tremendous and costly problem: it destabilizes families and communities, blocks economic progress, and impedes one out of three women worldwide from creating better lives for themselves and their families.

Last year, the U.S. government took a key step to support millions of women and girls by releasing its first ever U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally. This comprehensive strategy improves existing foreign assistance programs with the goal of helping to prevent, reduce and ultimately end violence against women.

This effort must be sustained through passage of the International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA), a bill that will make existing efforts to stop violence against women more integrated, effective and efficient, placing women at the center of U.S. diplomatic efforts where I believe it belongs.

I ask [your Member of Congress here] to support the bill and ask [his or her] colleagues to do the same.

Violence against women and girls is a pervasive human rights crisis that demands a strong response. I ask [your Member of Congress here] to do just that and support this effort.

Name
Town, State and affiliation