

## **WILPF Statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence**

The 25th of November is *International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women*. For the last 15 years, from this day until UN Human Rights Day (10 December) *16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence* are observed, recognized by the UN since 1999.

Protecting women's human rights and eliminating violence against women has advanced through the United Nations. Since 1995 substantial work has been done to implement the Beijing *Declaration and Platform for Action* arising from the 4<sup>th</sup> UN World Conference on Women; 185 countries – more than 90 percent of the UN member states – have now ratified the 1979 *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*; and, United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on *Women, Peace and Security* in 2000.

Despite this recognition, violence against women is a reality that cuts across borders, wealth, race, religion and culture. Every day women experience extensive violence, particularly in countries at war, in crisis or conflict where women's rights deteriorate and are under pressure:

- One in three women has been beaten, raped, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime; <sup>1</sup>
- Every fifth woman is subjected to rape or attempt to rape; <sup>1</sup>
- 70 percent of the casualties in recent conflicts have been non-combatants. 80 percent of these are women and children; <sup>1</sup>
- Systematic rape, sexual violence and abuse in Darfur, in Sudan, is used as a weapon in the war; <sup>1</sup>
- During the conflict between 1991 and 2002, it is estimated that a third of all women and girls in Sierra Leone were subjected to sexual violence; <sup>1</sup>
- Since the 1999 war Kosovo has become a major destination country for women and girls trafficked into forced prostitution. Around 15-20 percent of the women are allegedly under 14 years; <sup>1</sup>
- In Colombia 3.5-4 million people are displaced. The majority of these are women with many children. There are reports of increased violence against the women; <sup>2</sup>
- Every year 14,000 Russian women die as a result of violence in the home; <sup>1</sup>
- Every fifth day a Spanish woman is killed by her partner; <sup>1</sup>
- One in three Native American or Alaska Native women will be raped at some point in their lives; <sup>1</sup>
- Every fourth minute a woman in the USA is raped; <sup>1</sup>
- In fourteen countries a man can get mitigation of his sentence or impunity if he perpetrates violence or kills a woman in order to protect the so-called honour; <sup>1</sup>
- According to law in nine countries a rapist gets impunity if he marries his victim. <sup>1</sup>

Violence against women in war areas has, according to UNDP, reached epidemic heights. The common denominator for the 1990's conflicts and the conflicts in this millennium has been comprehensive sexual abuse, forced pregnancy as a tool in ethnic genocide, kidnapping, intentional infection with HIV/AIDS and trafficking in women and children for sexual purposes. <sup>3</sup>

Changes in the pattern of gender roles are one of the consequences of conflict, war or occupation. Violence and aggression becomes integrated into everyday life. When killing becomes legitimate, it also becomes legitimate to rape or buy and sell human bodies; a systematic brutalization of the whole society occurs resulting in numerous and grave assaults on women who are abused by family members as well as by unknown men, civilians as well as soldiers.

Every day and everywhere women are working for respect of their rights and for better conditions. WILPF honours the courage and endurance of women and recommits itself to eliminating violence against women, achieving disarmament and an end to violent conflicts.

Since 1915 when it was founded, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom has worked to eliminating war and militarism as the best way to reduce and eliminate violence in our societies and in the world. Ensuring that women are active participants in the decisions that affect their lives before, during and after conflicts is the best way to ensure that women's concerns and needs are on the agenda and get the priority they need.

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1) Amnesty International, international and Danish websites; 2) *Women Building Peace Around The World: The Case of Colombia in a 1325 perspective*, WILPF Delegation to Colombia, July 12– 20, 2007; 3) UNDP, Newsletter from the Nordic Office, 23th of April 2003.