

Recommendations for Bahá'í Communities in their preparation for the International Day for Violence Against Women and the 16 Days of Activism

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“..The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy”¹.

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Office for the Advancement of Women

¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited by the Universal House of Justice in its letter on Violence against Women dated 24 January 1993.

How to use this document?

The Bahá'í International Community's Office for the Advancement of Women has prepared the following recommendations for use by National Spiritual Assemblies and their Offices for the Advancement of Women. The aim of these recommendations is to facilitate the efforts of Bahá'í communities in sharing with government officials, civil society and media representatives the Bahá'í perspective and contribution to the issue of violence against women and girls. We also hope that you find the recommendations useful in raising greater awareness within the Bahá'í community about this issue by organizing consultations and workshops and by encouraging the friends to take an active role in this area in their local communities.






What is my role?

How can I benefit from this international event to advance the external affairs work?

The "Advancement of Women" is one of the four thematic focus points of the External Affairs Strategy issued by the Universal House of Justice in 1994. The strategy identifies National Spiritual Assemblies as the primary channels for this diplomatic work, as they are in the best position to influence their governments, national organizations and movements in the processes leading towards the establishment of a lasting peace. Bahá'í communities are also encouraged to engage like-minded people and organizations in our activities, inviting them to work with us and offering to work with them, to further the goal of achieving the equality of men and women which is a prerequisite for the establishment of world peace.

Those individuals who have been asked to be a representative of their NSAs Office for the Advancement of Women or have been asked to work in the area of women's advancement are in the best position to determine what their role is in this campaign in light of the guidance they receive from their National Spiritual Assembly.

Here are some questions that will help you determine a plan of action:

-  **Who are my major contacts in government and civil society?** (Ministry of Women or Family Affairs; Women Parliamentarians, Ministry of Health and Education etc.)
-  **Are there like-minded civil society and/or women's organizations to which I can introduce our community and work together with?**
-  **What message would I like to give them that is universal in scope but at the same time has relevance at the national level?**
-  **How can I present or share my message?** (through visits, workshops organizing collaborative events etc.) ?
-  **What should my achievement be at the end?** (to raise awareness of the critical nature of the epidemic of violence against women and girls, to present the Bahá'í view on the issue, to expand contacts at all levels and increase recognition of the Bahá'í community as key player in influencing public policy)

Background Information

In 1999, the United Nations officially recognized November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This day is now recognized as the beginning of 16 days of activism ending with Human Rights Day on 10 December. Communities, governments, civil society organizations and UN agencies around the world use this opportunity to organize various events to increase the recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation, raise awareness of the need for protective and preventive measures such as legal and judicial reforms, call for the establishment of women's centers and shelters, and educate girls and boys on this issue. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan issued an *"In-depth Study on all Forms of Violence Against Women"*, (see web link below) which, for the first time, gives high visibility and acknowledgement from the senior levels of the UN that violence against women is a massive human rights violation. The report point out that violence against women is both a cause and a consequence of deeply embedded inequality between men and women. Furthermore, the report calls for member states and UN entities to fulfill their obligation to protect women whether the perpetrators are state or non-state actors.

Recommendations for the VAW Campaign thematic areas:

You may consider highlighting the following issues, when advocating for elimination of Violence Against Women

(i) The Girl Child and (ii) the Role of Men and Boys,

Inclusion of the Girl Child's rights is important, when considering the Life Cycle approach: "...in many cultures, the discrimination against girls that begins in infancy can affect the course of their entire lives. Similarly, male attitudes towards gender and sexual relations are developed in boyhood, when they are often set for life. In addition, the needs and rights of individuals are different at different stages of life' For these reasons, it is important to embrace the life cycle approach to ensure that the empowerment approach takes into consideration both women and men at different stages of their lives."²

Please find enclosed Baha'i Statements on these thematic areas. You will also find these statements at the web site www.bic.org/areas-of-work/advancement-of-women

-The role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality:

www.bic.org/statements-and-reports/bic-statements/04-0312.htm

-Empowering the Girl Child

www.bic.org/statements-and-reports/bic-statements/98-0303.htm

² Lyfe Cyle Approach at UNFPA Web-site: <http://www.unfpa.org/gender/empowerment4.htm>

Recommendations for Action

- ✚ **ORGANIZE** - Get acquainted with the subject so that you can organize a gathering among Bahá'í women and men to review, discuss and share information about the BIC statement "*Beyond Legal Reforms: Culture and Capacity in the Eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls*" and on the Backgrounder (both of which are enclosed)
- ✚ **POST** – Place an announcement and information about the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on the national Bahá'í website and by providing a link to the Bahá'í statement. This will not only be a means of service by disseminating information but will help make the web site more relevant to internet searches on women's issues. Another suggestion is to use national Bahá'í newsletters, feast letters and schools to inform the community about the upcoming international day and related Bahá'í teachings.
- ✚ **PRESENT** – Present the BIC statement to women's organizations and centers, government officials responsible for women's advancement, i.e. women ministers, and other government representatives, academics, and university departments of women's studies. This will aid your efforts to invite them to serve in efforts supporting women's advancement.
- ✚ **PARTICIPATE** - You can participate in events planned by like-minded organizations and institutions involved in the advancement of women. Be part of a panel, workshop, conference, cultural event or other event as a community representative and contribute the Bahá'í perspective on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.
- ✚ **PUBLISH** – You may consider issuing a press release focused on your activities related to the status of the girl child and the role of men and boys in the elimination of violence against women and girls. Don't forget to have a report that you can publish on a website. A web friendly report of your activity, supported by photos and video recordings, will also provide you with opportunities to benefit from the new websites such as "You-Tube", community web sites and Bahá'í web-sites. In this way, you will be able to reach out to a wider target group.

Please send reports of your activities to the BIC OAW for inclusion in its planned news update and the Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office website.

Where can I get more information on the issue of Violence Against Women?

- Secretary General's Report: *In-depth Study on all Forms of Violence Against Women*.
 - ◆ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/index.htm>
- Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
 - ◆ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>
- United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/48/104, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*, 20 December 1993.
 - ◆ <http://www.documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N94/095/05/pdf/N9409505.pdf?OpenElement>
- Division for the Advancement of Women (under the United Nations):
 - ◆ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/index.html>
- United Nations (UNIFEM):
 - ◆ www.unifem.org
- Working Group on Girls (An NGO committee on UNICEF):
 - ◆ <http://www.girlsrights.org/Default.php>
- UNICEF, Innocenti Digest. "Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls". 6 June 2000. Innocente Research Center Florence, Italy.
 - ◆ <http://www.rb.se/NR/rdonlyres/DE6DBE61-D24F-4F88-BA1E-692872D53F51/0/Genderbasedviolencenew.pdf>
- World Health Organization (WHO)
 - ◆ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/print.html>
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
 - ◆ *State of World Population 2005, Violence Against Women Fact Sheet*.
http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_vaw.htm
 - ◆ International Symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond
<http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies/symposium06/index.htm>
- United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
 - ◆ <http://www.un-instraw.org/en/>

- INSTRAW, New Voices Scholar, Belen Sobrino: *Responding to “Violence Against Women”: How development policies address the issue of gender-based violence.*
 - ◆ <http://www.un-instraw.org/en/images/stories/NewVoices/nv-sobrino.pdf>
- The UN Works for Women
 - ◆ <http://www.un.org/works/beijing%2B10/>
- Charlotte Bunch, “The Intolerable Status Quo: Violence Against Women and Girls,” *The Progress of the Nations 1997*, UNICEF: 1997.
- Ferguson, Hearn, Holter, Jalmert, Kimmel, Lang, and Morrell, *Ending Gender-Based Violence: A Call For Global Action to Involve Men.*
- Penn, Michael L. and Nardos, Rahel: *Overcoming Violence Against Women and Girls: The international campaign to eradicate a worldwide problem.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Maryland, USA. © 2003.