

International Violence Against Women: Stories and Solutions

Hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BILL DELAHUNT

The hearing will come to order.

Violence against women should concern all of us because it is unjust, uncivilized, and immoral. The reality that domestic violence is perpetrated almost exclusively by men against women does not make it a women's issue but rather a male problem.

If violence against women is acceptable, then violence—wherever and whoever it is directed against—is acceptable.

I saw this firsthand. Before coming to Congress, I was the elected District Attorney in the metropolitan Boston area. I had the statutory responsibility for investigating crimes committed within maximum security prisons in Massachusetts. And I became familiar with the social history of inmates incarcerated in those facilities. Invariably, the men there who had committed acts of violence were the legacy of violent families where violence was accepted. And violence was the norm.

It is my opinion that when violence against women is implicitly sanctioned and not punished, violent behavior in general is encouraged—whether the victim is an individual, a community or even a nation.

It was Secretary Clinton who said that acts of violence against women don't "just harm a single individual, or a single family, or village, or group. They shred the fabric that weaves us together as human beings. It endangers families and communities, erodes social and political stability, and undermines economic progress." I could not agree more.

Tragically, examples of extreme violence against women abound. Rape is now routinely used as a tactic of war. Brutal violence is also rampant in

countries that don't face armed conflicts—whether in the home-- at the workplace-- or openly on the streets.

In Guinea—the New York Times referred to women as “prey”—reports show that armed soldiers beat, raped and killed women in broad daylight. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the violence is so profound that Major General Patrick Cammaert, former United Nations Peacekeeping Operation Commander, opined that it is more dangerous to be a woman there than a soldier.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women estimates that nearly a billion women globally will be beaten, raped, mutilated or otherwise abused during their lifetime. Disturbingly, nearly fifty percent of all sexual assaults worldwide are committed against girls aged fifteen or younger – most often at the hands of male family members.

The international community and United States must take a stand to protect women around the world. We must act not only because it is the right thing to do-- but because our own security is at risk. Keep in mind that a statement by the Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasizes that one of the most effective forces for defeating extremism is female education. Women hold the key for progress and development around the world. Women hold the key for our very own security.

This issue knows no boundaries. It is not an issue of the developing vs. the developed world. It is not a question of imposing one culture over another. Every person deserves to live a life free of violence.

I have no doubt that this issue can be addressed successfully and in time we shall see dramatic—and even unexpected—results. I mentioned earlier that I served as District Attorney in the metropolitan Boston area for some 22 years. In 1978, we created the first domestic violence unit in the nation. That program has been replicated not only elsewhere in this country, but internationally. The results we achieved were remarkable – domestic violence homicides averaged somewhere between 6 and 8 annually prior to the unit's creation. After the program was implemented, not a single domestic violence homicide occurred for more than a decade.

On a larger scale, USA Today indicated that the rate of reported rapes in the U.S. has hit a twenty-year low. Violent crime as a whole is decreasing. I believe this is at least partially due to the more aggressive response we as a society have taken towards violence against women.

I know we can achieve remarkable results internationally – should people of good will make this a priority.

I believe we have an unparalleled opportunity at this moment in time. The U.N. recently adopted Resolutions 1888 and 1889 -- condemning continuing sexual violence against women in conflict and post-conflict situations, in addition to combining its four agencies pertaining to women into one comprehensive super-agency.

Domestically, President Obama created the White House Council on Women and Girls, appointed a Senior Advisor on Violence Against Women and created the position of Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues. By doing so, the Administration put women's rights at the forefront of its domestic and foreign policy initiatives -- where they should be.

It is now time for Congress to act. That is why in the coming weeks I plan to introduce, with a number of my colleagues, the International Violence Against Women Act.

This legislation would:

- systematically integrate and coordinate efforts to end violence in foreign policy;**
- promote women's human rights and opportunities worldwide;**
- support and build the capacity of local NGOs working to end violence;**
- and**
- enhance training in humanitarian relief and crisis settings.**

This legislation is morally the right thing to do and is also smart policy in terms of global economic and security concerns. On September 29, 2009, we marked the 15th anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act. There is no reason why we should not be commemorating the first anniversary of the International Violence Against Women Act next year.