



Socialist International Women

SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL WOMEN

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

STATEMENT

The Socialist International Women (SIW) strongly believes that violence against women is a significant obstacle to the achievement of global gender equality and the true emancipation of women and girls. SIW fully supports the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and remains committed to continuing its work to promote gender equality and urge governments, civil society and NGOs to prioritise the elimination of violence against women as a matter of urgency.

For millions of women and girls the continuing worldwide epidemic of violence against women is causing immense physical, mental and financial suffering. On a daily basis the human rights of women are violated, their personal dignity is brutally stripped away and their ability to flourish and live healthy and meaningful lives is either severely diminished or entirely destroyed. In addition, inequalities in access to education, gender inequalities in women's pay in the workplace and limitations on access to work to earn an independent income continue to weaken the status of women and are in effect a kind of economic gender based violence against women.

Violence against women takes many forms which affect all aspects of women's personal and public lives. The statistics available on the number of women affected by violence are deeply distressing and shocking. One in every two women worldwide who are killed by a violent act is killed by a current or past intimate partner or a member of their own family. Over 4.4 million women and girls are trapped in human trafficking activities and regularly suffer rape, sexual violence and sexual slavery. Over 233 million girls worldwide were married before the age of 15 and once married in many cases a girl's education ceases and her right to make any of her own life choices ends. At least 200 million women living today have undergone FGM and the majority of these were mutilated before they were five years old.

The damage caused by violence against women can have severe long-term implications. In some cases the physical and emotional scars sustained from violent behaviours mean that women can no longer work or support themselves. In such cases there is also a painful impact on their children, their families and their communities which can last for several generations.

The elimination of violence against women is an urgent priority for SIW in line with its core principles of promoting a fair and just society for all citizens. As a political organisation SIW is also firmly committed to the creation of gender parity within political processes and structures. The voices, interests, needs and concerns of both women and men are required to ensure that vital societal mechanisms such as legislation, budget allocation, policies and electoral procedures are both truly representative and fair for all members of our communities and nations.

Unfortunately, in some regions gender based political violence is severely hindering the progress of women within the political arena. In some regions the resistance to female politicians is largely cultural, with the role and status of women being seen as somehow inappropriate for political life. In other regions men appear to be shocked at the capabilities

of women politicians and the powerful collective voice of women pulling together in solidarity and seek to weaken and destroy it.

Women politicians suffer violence in a number of ways. In some cases women and their families are threatened with violence or actually attacked to stop them from continuing their political life. There are also instances where female politicians are intimidated into resigning from positions they have legitimately won in elections. Violence can also be perpetrated against a woman's character, as in cases of deliberately aggressive media stories demeaning a female politician in such a way that her political career is ruined. There are also regions where local laws and customs forbid women from engaging in political activity altogether and suffer violence if they protest about this.

SIW strongly advocates the elimination of political violence against female politicians and candidates and will continue to promote the cause of the introduction of gender parity into all political and government organisations.

Gender-based violence is preventable as it is a learned behaviour that becomes normalised and reinforced by the prevailing views of a society. These behaviours and views can - and must - be changed. Improving the education of both women and men in gender equality issues and normalising the equal status of women with men is one of the most powerful ways to begin to eliminate violence against women. Governments and civil society also have the power to challenge and change negative stereotypes in the media. However, the political will to push forward change must be strongly encouraged in order for this power to be exercised, and for this to happen the increased political participation of women is an essential factor.

The impact of wars and civil unrest is also felt most severely by women and children, despite the fact that they rarely have any voice or influence on the events that lead to this kind of violence. Recent UNICEF figures show that almost 80 per cent of the 53 million people displaced within their own countries by wars today are women and children. The number of women and girls raped and brutalised in one recent conflict alone has been estimated at between 100,000 to 250,000. These women suffered without any kind of support or medical attention and many became pregnant, contracted HIV and other sexually transmitted infections as a result of their horrific treatment. The tearing apart of families and communities also causes immense traumatisation and increased vulnerability to abuse for entire generations of children.

Women and children who have been forced to flee their homelands due to war or civil conflict are also more at risk of physical violence, sexual violence, abuse and exploitation. In many cases they have no possessions of value with them and no means of supporting themselves, so they are at the mercy of those around them and the international community to support them.

Peace, equality and sustainable development cannot happen without ending violence against women. The SIW supports all efforts to promote the elimination of violence against women in all its forms and asserts that this is a vital and urgent step towards the achievement of true gender equality and the full realisation of the human rights of women and girls worldwide.

The Socialist International Women (SIW) calls on all Governments, Member Parties of the Socialist International and NGOs with beliefs and core values similar to the SIW, to commit to supporting the principles of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and to demonstrate willingness to make the elimination of violence against women a reality.

The SIW calls for urgent action to:

- *Encourage* the discussion of gender equality issues at local party and national government level with particular emphasis on discussion of actions which can be taken to achieve the elimination of violence against women and the elimination of violence against women politicians.
- *Support* women in increasing their political participation, such as providing advice and coaching at party level in preparation for elections and by encouraging the promotion of gender parity within party organs and manifestos.
- *Ensure* local and national legislation and policies are gender sensitive and provide genuine protection of women and girls from gender based violence, including ensuring policing practices and judicial procedures are fair and just.
- *Promote* the inclusion of educational literature and programmes on gender equality issues in local communities, schools, universities, colleges, private and public organisations to encourage the discussion of gender equality and the social normalisation of the equal status of women and men.
- *Challenge* negative stereotypes regarding women in electoral, governmental and institutional environments and the media and encourage positive representations of women and the promotion of the benefits to society of gender equality.
