

MEDIA RELEASE

LET US REMEMBER

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 2013

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is a reminder that violence against women and girls is a global issue and that ending this violence is everyone's responsibility. Today is an opportunity to celebrate how far we have come, to acknowledge what else needs to be done, and to renew our efforts and reaffirm our commitment. Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive violations of human rights in the world today. It affects women and girls across all cultures and societies and remains a significant public health and global development issue.

Today, *let us remember* that violence against women and girls is both a cause and consequence of gender and structural inequalities, a construct of power, and though prevalent- it can be prevented. Australia has an exciting opportunity through the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children to be a global leader and to drive the requisite social change needed to prevent violence against women and girls. We need governments, specialist preventing and responding to violence against women sectors, schools, business, industry, media and communities to join forces and work in partnership to end violence against women and girls. We need a long-term, sustainable, comprehensive, whole-of-community approach to prevent and ultimately end violence against women and girls.

- Julie Oberin, Chairperson, AWAVA

25 November has been marked by advocates and anti-violence activists as a day focused on the elimination of violence since 1981. It was initiated following the brutal assassination in 1960 of the three Mirabal sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic, on orders from Dominican ruler Rafael Trujillo. In 1999, the United Nations declared 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women with the aim of inviting the organisation of, and participation in, activities designated to raise public awareness and advocate for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. 25 November is also marked as White Ribbon day, a day created in 1991 to remember the second anniversary of one man's massacre of fourteen women in Montreal, Canada.

25 November also marks the start of **16 Days of Activism** – where thousands of activists from around the world take part in campaigns to demand an end to violence against women. Globally, the focus of the 16 Days of Activism in 2013 is awareness and action on the intersections of gender-based violence and militarism and the connection between the struggle for socio-economic rights and ending violence against women and girls.

Today, **let us remember** the Mirabal Sisters, the *Inolvidables Mariposas* ("Unforgettable Butterflies") whose lives remain a poignant and sobering reminder of the global nature of violence against women.

Let us remember that 1 in 3 women in Australia has experienced domestic violence. Let us remember that every week, 1 woman dies as a result of domestic violence and that domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness in our country.

Let us remember that 1 in 5 women in Australia has experienced sexual assault. Let us remember that rape-supportive attitudes, victim-blaming, myths and misconceptions continue to flourish in our society. Let us remember that 34% of

Australians continue to believe that rape is caused by men's poor impulse control and that these are the attitudes we need to change. Let us remember that we must break the cycles of shame and secrecy that surround sexual violence across Australia.

Let us remember that violence against women and girls has wide-ranging and persistent effects on women's health and well-being and increases their disease burden and risk of anxiety and depression.

Let us remember that violence against women and girls includes psychological, economic, financial, and emotional abuse. It encompasses a range of behaviours and processes of coercive control rather than only acts which cause physical injury. Threats, humiliation and intimidation tactics that are used to harm, punish, or frighten, all form the continuum of violence against women and girls.

Let us remember that the experience and impact of violence against women is not evenly distributed and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, immigrant and refugee women, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, women with disabilities, women who identify as bi-sexual, lesbian, same sex attracted, queer, transgender or intersex are subjected to interpersonal and public violence at greater than average rates, and that such violence is compounded by experiences of marginalisation.

Let us remember that violence against women needs to be understood in the intersectional context of gender, sex, sexuality, racism, colonialism, classism, homophobia and able body-ism.

Let us remember violence against women and their children costs the Australian economy \$13.6 billion annually and this is expected to rise to \$15.6 billion by 2021. It is believed that the annual cost has already reached \$14.7 billion.

Let us remember that primary prevention of violence includes awareness raising but it is far more than that. It is important that those advocating for awareness raising around violence against women and girls do so responsibly and in a nuanced manner and without leading to an increase in turn-away at services, shelters, and refuges unable to cater for the concomitant increase in demand for their services.

Let us remember and acknowledge the role men can play to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls. We join our male allies in speaking out to end the endemic and structural nature of violence and we urge them to join women in the campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls in Australia and across the world.

And finally, **let us remember** that in order to eliminate violence against women, we must reduce gender and social inequalities in power, challenge gender stereotypes, promote women's empowerment and substantive equality, as well as promote long term behavioural and attitudinal change in our communities and societies. Effective social change requires engaging governments and communities and fostering local activism and advocacy in conjunction with consistent and strong responses from the justice system towards perpetrators.