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"Violence against women: Good practices in  
combating and eliminating violence against women"

Expert Group Meeting

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**Building Promising Practices: campaigning, awareness raising and  
capacity building to combat violence against women - a human rights  
approach**

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## **1 Introduction**

Violence against women (VAW) is universal but it is not inevitable. A recent World Health Organization report points out that communities that condemn violence, take action to end it and provide support for survivors have lower levels of violence than communities that do not take such action. In a comparative study of 16 countries, researchers found that levels of partner violence are lowest in those societies with community sanctions (whether in the form of legal action, social approbation or moral pressure) and sanctuaries (shelters or family support systems).<sup>1</sup>

All over the world women's rights activists have led efforts to expose VAW; to give victims a voice; to provide innovative forms of support; to force governments and the international community to recognize their own failure to protect women; and to hold all those responsible to account. They have shown that organizing to combat VAW can make a real difference. In March 2004 in partnership with the women's movements Amnesty International (AI) began its six-year Stop Violence Against Women (SVAW) global campaign mobilizing its more than 1.8 million members and supporters worldwide to add their voices to this struggle to stop VAW<sup>2</sup>.

This paper describes some promising practices for successful campaigning. It describes a human rights framework to hold states ac



It takes more than recognizing state's responsibility to stop VAW; if the state is not taking its obligations seriously pressure needs to be brought to bear to create change. AI has produced a step-by-step guide to using due diligence as a campaigning tool to stop VAW<sup>6</sup>. In practical terms, invoking the standard of due diligence:

- ! Gives campaigners a way of using the human rights framework to stop VAW by invoking state responsibility for violations by state and non-state actors.
- ! Provides a concrete framework for demanding a range of reforms, from bringing non-state perpetrators to justice to preventative measures.
- ! Can be invoked at the local level, and sets the basis for dialogues with local authorities, politicians and other leaders.

This guide is supported by two legal documents that are guides to human rights law and standards relating to women's rights not to suffer violence. One covers domestic violence, violence in the community, criminal law, addressing VAW and appropriate remedies for victims and survivors of VAW, and the other international standards to VAW in conflict.<sup>7</sup>

### **2.1 A campaigning example - Sweden**

The issue of VAW has been widely debated in Sweden and the government has implemented many positive measures. However, VAW remains serious and widespread, with many Swedes not recognizing VAW

women wearing white wedding dresses. Every fourth woman had black roses for her wedding bouquet and a black bridal veil representing violence in marriage. In Gothenburg and Lund, women's rights groups and AI members collected hundreds of handprints, (the symbol of AI's campaign), on a huge white cloth. The Section was not prepared for the interest that the report generated, not only locally but also nationally. It was greater than any other report AI Sweden has produced. Within a month all 2000 copies were sold out.

The day after the launch of the report the Ministry of Justice issued a press release, stating that a working group with representatives from four different ministries was being set up that very day. In the press release the Minister for Gender Equality Affairs, Mona Sahlin, stated that: "*Amnesty's report on men's VAW shows that the tightened laws concerning men's VAW are not implemented the way they should be. Many battered women are left with no support from society. This is unacceptable and we are going to change this.*" AI was invited to meet the working group.

From their research and the response to it AI Sweden identified implementation and access to services, particularly in municipalities, as the key issues. The law states that it "*shall provide services to victims of crimes, including partner abuse*". In their second report AI Sweden decided to establish if this was indeed the case. They did a study to establish whether enough was being done at a municipal level using AI groups in each municipality. The 290 municipalities were divided between AI groups and guidelines were prepared for AI members, including a questionnaire, suggestions for letters, whom to contact in the municipality and so on. This was to ensure that the approach was consistent across the country. The Section encouraged groups to meet with municipalities and call on local media to cover the issue. Information was obtained on 75% of the municipalities. Replies to the questionnaire were all forwarded to the Section and formed the basis of the second report, *Not a Priority Issue. A Review of the Work of Swedish Municipalities to Combat Men's Violence against Women*.<sup>11</sup>

The questionnaire covered the following issues: Is men's VAW included in discussions at a political level? Do municipalities have plans of action? What is the level of cooperation between different authorities and NGOs? How high is the prevalence of VAW in municipalities? What is the role of non-profit women's shelters? What resource does the municipality contribution to shelters? What service is provided to women with special needs who cannot obtain help from a shelter? Is there information available about where to seek help? What measures are being taken to raise awareness?

The report was launched on 7 March 2005. The number of visible outreach activities grew from five to 25 cities for the launch. The report received a lot of media attention

protection in all municipalities. In addition, there has been another very positive success of this campaign – men are

forcibly conscripted into militias and armed groups committed rape and other forms of sexual abuse against mainly girls and women with impunity.<sup>13</sup> The August 2003 Accra Peace Agreement ushered in a National Transitional Government and the deployment of 15,000 United Nations peacekeeping forces throughout the country allowing civilians to move more freely and disarmament and demobilisation is being carried out. The Project Officer returned to Liberia in September 2003 and the project began again in November.

The aim of the project was to create a network of human rights volunteers at community level in three counties. To ensure sustainability people already active in their community and belonging to a local organisation or group such as community development organisations, religious groups or women's groups were targeted and trained. This group also had the advantage of being familiar with the local cultural and social dynamics and so better able to assess the problems and possibilities for change within their communities.

Trainers selected from each of the counties received an initial training of trainers workshops and went on to provide training to volunteer activists<sup>14</sup>. Training was also provided to some local theatre groups to support the volunteers in their community based activities. Training was provided in raising human rights awareness, mobilising people against injustice and monitoring and reporting human rights violations. To strengthen the rural base of the networks in each county a County Coordinating Committee (CCC) consisting of three to five local NGOs, including women's groups, organised the training and follow up meetings of volunteers, provided support to the volunteers and helped coordinate their activities. A Project Officer provided overall coordination of the Project who in turn receives support from other NHRCL members and staff. The Project involved volunteers in three kinds of activities:

- ! *Raising human rights awareness*: to ensure people knew their rights to enable them to resist abuse of power by the authorities and to claim their rights. It was agreed that this process should also aim to promote equality, tolerance and respect for diversity, including gender, religion and ethnicity.
- ! *Mobilising communities to claim their rights*: Volunteers were expected to play a facilitating role in this rather than acting on behalf of others, e.g. assisting the community to find ways to demand their rights are protected and respected.
- ! *Monitoring and reporting human rights violations*: Volunteers were expected to regularly write reports about the human rights situation in their community and give these either to the CCC, one of the trainers or directly to a visitor from the NHRCL. They were asked to report serious human rights violations immediately.

In addition to the network of rural volunteers, the project also included the promotion of the use of drama in human rights work in rural areas, the production of simple materials to raise human rights awareness in rural areas and capacity building for Monrovia-based human rights organisations including on VAW. Two theatre facilitators were contracted to provide drama and human rights training to two local theatre groups in each county. Two human rights activists assisted the theatre facilitators in designing and providing the theatre training. A total of 60 persons

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<sup>13</sup> At the time of the Project

participated in the drama workshops.<sup>15</sup> Participatory theatre is an effective way of engaging women and men to start raising awareness, particularly in rural areas.

One of the major successes of the Project has been the inclusion and involvement of women. Approximately 45% of the volunteers and trainers are women. This was largely due to applying a quota system, which generated a heated debate. Some felt that human rights work was too risky for women. It has had a strong positive influence on the kinds of issues that volunteers work with at community level and also the way issues were tackled. The rights of women have come to prominence, including issues of domestic violence and this is now more broadly and easily discussed. It has also enhanced women's confidence to participate, which was in evidence during the evaluation workshops and discussions. The whole training program had a gender dimensions and therefore all the men who were involved in the project received gender awareness training and have subsequently been involved in supporting survivors of sexual violence and reporting rape case. The documentation of VAW in Liberia is very limited and to strengthen this a specific training on monitoring and documenting VAW was held in April 2004 for women's rights activists from organizations working with survivors of violence. To facilitate documentation n



The overall goal of AIUK's public communication campaign is to "*assist men to realise their roles and responsibilities in challenging and eradicating violence against women in the UK thereby changing the nature of the existing debate to one of men's responsibility rather than the deconstruction of women's behaviour*"<sup>19</sup>. This is a very broad campaign goal, and in order to achieve it a range of specific campaign objectives have been set. Pre-campaign research undertaken has enabled AIUK to design targeted, measurable and realistic objectives based on benchmarking statistics, so that informational and attitudinal change can be measured. AIUK is not seeking to achieve a behaviour



domestic violence amongst adult men challenging societal complacency around domestic violence, and improving their knowledge about the true extent of domestic violence against women in the UK

increasingly observed and documented links between the lack of equality, gender-based violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS makes it all the more urgent for states to fulfil those responsibilities identified in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

Following the organizations 2001 International Council Meeting, AI has widened the scope of its work to include documenting and campaigning against violations of the rights protected under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in





**Appendix I**  
**Campaigning to Stop Violence Against Women<sup>30</sup>**  
The Campaigning to Stop Violence Against Women gui

## Appendix II

### AIUK Campaign framework Problem? What Problem?<sup>32</sup>

Campaigns can raise issues but short term raising of public awareness cannot have long term effects. To be effective at this level, campaigns need to be combined with education and training. AIUK's aim is to influence the attitudes of the target audiences, with the view to being the first stage of an eventual behavioural change. AIUK has been very careful not to set objectives that talk about achieving behavioural change. Changing behaviour permanently can take a very long time – particularly when it comes to the issue of violence against women, which is based in the social and ideological construction of society as a whole.

AIUK's VAW campaign has been designed with reference to the Transtheoretical Model – also known as the Stages of Change Model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983), which identifies six key stages to permanent behavioural change:

Stage	Characteristics	Sample Statement
<b>1. Pre-contemplation</b>	! Individual has not yet considered changing their behaviour.	<i>"I don't know anything about it. I don't hit my partner, none of my friends hit their partners, and I don't know anyone who has been a victim. It's not part of the world I live in."</i>
	! Probably not even aware of the consequences of their action/inaction.	
<b>2. Contemplation</b>	! Greater and more accurate understanding of the pros and cons of changing the behaviour, but not yet ready to commit because the cons seem to outweigh the pros	<i>"I understand that I can do something to intervene when m</i>



AIUK to see which stage the target audience is at, and how messages should be modified in order to move to the next stage.

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