

S&F Online

www.barnard.edu/sfonline

Double Issue: 3.3 & 4.1

The Scholar & Feminist XXX:

Past Controversies, Present Challenges, Future Feminisms

Document Archive

Amnesty International's Campaign to Stop Violence Against Women

By:

Sheila Dauer and Barbara Schulman

On March 5, 2004, Amnesty International launched its first international Campaign to Stop Violence Against Women. The articles in this and subsequent issues of *Interact* cover forms of violence against women in many countries and provide actions you can take to press for government and community action to end violence. Amnesty International's campaign will tackle two of the most widespread and serious forms of violence against women—that which occurs in armed conflict and that which occurs in the home.

Violence against women is one of the greatest human rights scandals of our time. Violence occurs in all regions of the world and it is a problem that is grossly under reported.

We can understand this under reporting, though. In many places, violence against women and girls is not recognized as a crime. Did you know that only 16 nations have legislation specifically referring to sexual assault, and as few as three have legislation that specifically addresses violence against women as a category of criminal activity in itself (Bangladesh, Sweden and USA). We know that domestic violence is widespread. Yet 79 countries have no legislation against domestic violence. Government figures for the USA show there were over 700,000 reported incidents of domestic violence in 2001. A current or former partner kills around one third of women murdered in our country each year.

Violence against women during conflict has reached epidemic proportions. Rape and sexual violence during war has always been a problem but they were thought to be an inevitable outcome of war. The so-called "comfort women" who were forced by the Japanese to serve in military brothels, were not able to disclose what had happened to them until 50 years later. Mass rape is frequently used systematically, as a weapon of war. Over 500,000 women were raped during the 100 days of genocide in 1994 in Rwanda. In 1998, the first judgement ever on rape and sexual violence as genocide was issued by the Rwanda Tribunal. AI joined a large coalition of human rights

and women's groups to secure the most advanced gender sensitive language regarding the crime of rape in any international treaty in the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court. Armed conflict renders women economically devastated. They must become breadwinners while also carrying the responsibility of raising the family. Trafficking of women and girls is now recognized to be widespread during and post armed conflict. It has been reported in 85% of conflict zones .

Why is Amnesty launching this campaign now? For more than a decade, the international community has recognized violence against women as a human rights abuse. But progress at the international level has not been matched at the local level. Amnesty International brings the power of our 1.8 million membership and the persuasion of the human rights framework to this effort to end violence against women. The human rights framework demands accountability for violence against women and points to the obligations of governments and other actors to prevent, investigate and punish violence. The human rights framework asserts that all women and girls everywhere have the human right to live free of violence regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class or age. Amnesty adds documentation and evidence not only of what kinds of violence exist and how these occur with impunity, but also of how violence deprives women of all their other rights. AI's campaign will force governments, communities, religious groups and ordinary people around the world to take violence against women seriously and to do something real to end it. Visit our website (www.amnestyusa.org/stopviolence) frequently to find information from AI about violence against women and actions you can take to stop the suffering. If you would like to find a listing of events we are organizing near you, click on the section in our Stop Violence webpage that shows you what region of the country you live in. Together, we can make a difference.