

On International Women's Day, Let's Help Stop Violence Against Women Worldwide

By Esta Soler

One in three. That's the chance women worldwide have of experiencing violence some time in their lives, according to the United Nations. In some countries, it's much worse – seven in ten women will suffer.

Violence against women and girls takes many forms – from trafficking in Eastern Europe and Asia, to honor killings in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, to rape being used as a weapon of war in Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo, to rape, stalking and domestic violence in industrialized countries like the United States.

No country is immune, but some are better positioned than others to help stop it. Here in the United States, we can do much more to keep women and girls safe than we're doing today.

Last fall, Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) introduced groundbreaking legislation to combat the global crisis of violence against women and girls. The *International Violence Against Women Act* (I-VAWA) would apply the force of U.S. diplomacy and foreign aid totaling \$1 billion over five years to preventing abuse and exploitation against women worldwide. It would integrate efforts to end gender-based violence into all existing, appropriate U.S. foreign assistance programs, with a special emphasis on supporting the overseas women's groups that are working in the trenches to keep women and girls safe.

I-VAWA would authorize substantial resources for international programs that prevent violence, provide services to survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, change public attitudes, and better address violence against women in humanitarian situations. It would aim to prevent violence in all of its forms, including honor killings, bride burnings, acid burnings, dowry deaths, genital mutilation, mass rapes in war, or domestic violence.

The bill is languishing right now – there have been no hearings, and little movement. On International Women's Day, let's resolve to change that by calling or writing our Senators and Representatives and asking them to support the *International Violence Against Women Act*.

If we pass this legislation, we will help stop a global crisis. We will help keep the next generation safe. We will give women and girls – and their families – worldwide a vastly better chance to lead safer, healthier lives.

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