



16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE
16 DÍAS DE ACTIVISMO CONTRA LA VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO
16 JOURS D'ACTIVISME CONTRE LA VIOLENCE DE GENRE
25 NOV - 10 DEC <http://16dayscwg.rutgers.edu>



INFORMATION SHEET #4

Political Violence Against Women - Political violence - the use of violence to achieve political aims – often affects men and women differently. Across the world, women are involved in political processes as voters, political candidates, advocates for social and political change, and peace-builders. Given the multiple roles they play, women may face both direct and indirect attacks that seek to discredit, limit, and/or prevent their political participation. While men also experience political violence, women may face different forms of violence because of the intimate relationship among patriarchy, militarism and nationalism. For example, women may experience violence because of beliefs that they should not participate in the political sphere; as prominent public figures, women may be attacked for not conforming to ideals about what women should be. Gendered attacks range from derogatory comments about behavior and/or appearance to sexuality baiting to death threats and outright physical attacks. This is further complicated in countries where political forces have deep ties to/with the military, either through a “revolving door” between the upper echelons of the military, corporations and politicians or through military institutions that heavily influence political agendas. These arenas are often controlled by the same chauvinist culture, which places further barriers on women’s ability to participate.

Before and during elections, women may be targeted for violence as representatives of their communities. For example, rape might be used against women of an entire community in order to intimidate and influence votes. Attacks on women and girls also serve as a strategy to humiliate men who are ‘unable to protect’ or ‘defend the honor’ of ‘their women.’ In recent political events across the Arab world, women have played crucial roles in peaceful protest movements, and in many other places (e.g. Liberia), women’s involvement in negotiations has helped to bring about peace. Despite this involvement, there is a risk that women may be left out of discussions about the emerging democratic political process, or excluded from political roles in new governments. In addition, governments may suspend rule of law in “emergency” periods and label women human rights defenders (WHRDs) as “terrorists” to silence their voices.

Despite the political violence that women face, they have made invaluable contributions to peaceful and democratic processes and movements. In addition to encouraging more women to participate in the political sphere, the promotion and support of women leaders who have both feminist and pacifist ideals are important. Women’s increased participation in speaking out against violence in their communities, in decision-making processes, and in promoting women’s rights is essential for building new political structures and systems in order to create more peaceful and democratic societies. The support of male allies is a necessary ingredient in the formation of new structures that create spaces for women to be heard and meaningfully included in decision-making.

Yanar’s Account

Baghdad, Iraq

“Although women in Iraq have been suffering for 8 years after occupation and they have been the major losers under the so-called ‘liberation’ of Iraq, they decided with the beginning of the Arab revolutions to take politics into their hands and to organize demonstrations in the Tahrir Square of Baghdad and other cities of Iraq. Our Organisation of Women’s Freedom in Iraq has actively participated in organizing the youth of Tahrir Square and as a punishment for that, the government has hired gangsters and they unleashed them on our female activists. On Friday, June 10, 2011 they humiliated them, they sexually harassed them, and they beat them up severely in order to give them a lesson that women have no place in the political struggle in the Middle East, and mainly in Iraq.”

Several of OWFI’s members were beaten, groped, kicked, and one woman’s tooth was broken. The men tried to tear the women’s clothes off, and called them ‘prostitutes’ and ‘communists.’ To read more about the assault against OWFI’s protestors, please see: <http://www.equalityiniraq.com/>

To watch video testimonies from Aya and Ahlam of OWFI, please see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46SY0U9IQQQ>

Suggested Actions

- **Support Women Human Rights Defenders:** Host a program on International Women Human Rights Defenders Day (Nov. 29th) to discuss the ways that women defenders are targeted for violence, and make links to the deeper issues that contribute to such violence (militarism, conceptions about the public/private divide and gender roles, women transgressing social norms, accusations of ‘Westernization,’ etc.). For more information and resources on Women Human Rights Defenders, please visit: <http://www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/>
- **Monitor the Media:** The media plays an important role in influencing politics, elections, and perceptions of public figures. Start a project to monitor the media: What is the media saying about women in politics? How does the media describe women who are public figures (e.g. Is the focus more on women’s appearance, Are women primarily referred to in relation to men, e.g., someone’s wife, daughter, sister)?
- **Network:** Build strong media connections – Work with the media to disseminate key messages about violence against women and militarism. Organize trainings among activists, female politicians, and the media to teach women how to effectively utilize traditional media, new social media (Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, blogs, etc.), and texting.
- **Create Safe Spaces:** Leading up to elections, advocate for accessible and safe community polling stations. If there is concern about police or military intimidation at polling stations, discuss community-based protection measures and ways to report them to election monitoring bodies.
- **Strengthen Women’s Political Participation:** Organize a training session for women interested in running for political office, start a mentoring and support network that connects experienced female politicians with new candidates, and encourage young women to participate.
- **Shift the Focus:** A main goal of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf) is to empower more women to participate in leadership roles in conflict prevention and resolution. However, many governments have focused on encouraging more women to join the military. During the 16 Days Campaign, lobby governments and funders to shift their priorities towards bolstering women’s participation in peace-building and politics!

Resources

- Barcia, Inmaculada. (June 2011) Urgent Responses for Women Human Rights Defenders at Risk: Mapping and Preliminary Assessment. AWID & the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition. <http://www.awid.org/Library/Urgent-Responses-for-Women-Human-Rights-Defenders-at-Risk-Mapping-and-Preliminary-Assessment>
- Jones, Rochelle. (30 June 2011) “Women Making Change in the Middle East and North Africa.” <http://awid.org/eng/News-Analysis/Friday-Files/Women-Making-Change-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-AfricaResource>
- Moser, Caroline O. N. and Fiona C. Clark. (2001) Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict, and Political Violence. New Delhi: Zubaan (available on Google Books).

Websites

- iKNOW Politics: <http://www.iknowpolitics.org/>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Women in Politics Section: <http://www.ipu.org/iss-e/women.htm>
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: <http://www.idea.int/>
- Violence Against Women in Politics (South Asia-based): <http://www.vawip.org/>