

The Opinion Page

End Violence Against Women Campaign Noted

POTSDAM - Since 1991, the Center for Women's Global Leadership has been marking the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign between Nov. 25, the International Day Against Violence Against Women, and Dec. 10, International Human Rights Day.

These dates symbolically link violence against women and human rights, and emphasize that such violence is a human rights violation.

The 16 Days Campaign theme, From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let's Challenge Militarism and End Violence Against Women!, puts the spotlight on militarism and its role in perpetuating violence against women and girls.

"The violence we encounter is often profoundly influenced by national, regional, and international policies and practices, and challenges us to act in solidarity to promote an end to militarism and violence against women," says Dr. Radhika Balakrishnan, executive director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, the coordinator of the 16 Days Campaign.

Hundreds of events by organizations worldwide are planned to campaign against gender-based violence, which is experienced by up to 70 of women in their lifetime, according to the United Nations.

It is estimated that worldwide, one in five women will experience rape or attempted rape. Women aged 15-44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, car accidents, war, and malaria.

Since 1991, the annual 16 Days Campaign has mobilized more than 3,700 organizations in 164 countries to raise awareness about the pervasiveness of the multiple forms of violence women face.

From Afghanistan to Iceland, the 16 Days Campaign has grown into a powerful platform to educate the public and governments about violence against women and human rights.

Among the other special United Nations commemorative days within the 16 days is International Women Human Rights Defenders Day. Nov. 29 is a day of recognition for women human rights defenders, and it is a day to commemorate activism, advocacy and courageous acts of resistance.

World AIDS Day is observed every year on Dec. 1, marking the beginning of the annual campaign designed to encourage public support for, and development of, programs to prevent the spread of HIV infection, and provide education and promote awareness of issues surrounding HIV/AIDS. It was first observed in 1988 after a summit of health ministers from around the world called for a spirit of social tolerance and a greater exchange of information on HIV/AIDS.

Dec. 2 is the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery, marking the date of the adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others in 1949.

The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons on Dec. 3 aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

The theme of the Day is based on the goal of full and equal enjoyment of human rights and participation in society by persons with disabilities, adopted by the General Assembly in 1982.

Dec. 5 is International Volunteer Day for Social and Economic Development, providing an opportunity for volunteer-involving organizations and individual volunteers to work together on projects and campaigns promoting their contributions to economic and social development at local, national and international levels. IVD was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1985.

Dec. 6 marks the anniversary of the Montreal Massacre when, in 1989, 25 year-old Marc Lepine walked into the University of Montreal's School of Engineering Building with semi-automatic rifle. He began a shooting spree during which he murdered fourteen women and injured thirteen others: nine women and four men.

Lepine believed it was because of women students that he was not accepted to the engineering school. Before killing himself, he left an explanatory letter behind which contained a tirade against feminists as well as a list of nineteen prominent women whom he particularly despised.

The final day is Dec. 10, when the world celebrates the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). On this date, the nations of the world joined together to try to bury, once and for all, the specter of genocide raised by the Second World War.

The UDHR was one of the first major achievements of the United Nations and provided the basic philosophy for many legally-binding international instruments to follow.

In 2010, AAUW-NYS launched My Sister's Keeper, a statewide initiative to foster a greater understanding of the plight of women worldwide and within our domestic borders. Among the areas of concern are gendercide, violence, lack of educational opportunities, the lack of maternal health care and efforts to support the rights of women, and gender equality. Learn more at www.aauw-nys.org/msk.htm.

Locally, the branches of AAUW-NYS's District 7, the North Country AAUW, were the underwriters for WPBS's broadcast of the Women, War and Peace series locally to promote a greater understanding of these issues and to showcase places where women have overcome tremendous obstacles to promote and find peace in the midst of war. The full series is now available on-line for watching at www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/.

Membership in the St. Lawrence County Branch is open to anyone who supports the mission of AAUW.

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research. AAUW's commitment to equity is reflected in its public policy advocacy, community programs, leadership development, conventions and conferences, national partnerships, and international connections.

AAUW, with its nationwide network of more than 100,000 members, more than 1,000 branches conducting programs in communities across the country, and 500 college and university partners, has been a leading advocate for equity and education for women and girls since 1881.

For more information about AAUW in St. Lawrence County, contact President Becky Gerber at 268-9957, gerber1@potdam.edu or Public Policy Chair Kathleen Stein at 386-3812, kstein1@twcnj.rr.com, or visit the branch website, www.northnet.org/stlawrenceaauw/index.html