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16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign
Opinion Editorial by US Embassy Charge d'Affaires Thomas Pierce

This year, as we once again take up the "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence," commencing on November 25 with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and ending December 10 with International Human Rights Day, the international community must answer the call to free women from violence. We must stand up to the impunity that too often leaves the most egregious perpetrators unaccountable for their crimes. We must redress the poor status of women and girls around the world that renders them undervalued and vulnerable. Further, we must support the inclusion of men and boys in addressing and preventing violence and changing gender attitudes, as well as acknowledging that males can also be victimized because of their gender.

Guyana has some strong contributions in this battle, and the struggle continues. The Guyana branch of Men's Empowerment Network, which works to build stronger, principled men and includes discussions of anger management and respect for families and women among their core precepts, is a positive example. The media's constant attention to this topic, and the Ministry of Labor, Human Services and Social Services' Women's Affairs Bureau, as well as the new effort for a Men's Affairs Bureau, show the concern the Guyanese people and the Government of Guyana have for this issue. The active participation of Guyanese Police officers in a meeting they requested with United States Embassy guest speaker Beth Feder and a former U.S. police officer demonstrate their interest in addressing this problem.

Guyana is not unique. Violence against women touches every nation in the world. Gender-based violence is a global pandemic that cuts across all borders on ethnic, racial, and class levels. It can threaten women and girls at any point in their life cycle - through inadequate access to education, healthcare and nutrition, child marriage, domestic violence, and rape. Gender-based violence also has profound socio-economic consequences for all of society. It not only undermines the possibility of gender equality, it negatively affects women's healthcare, education, and political and economic participation.

Cooperation between Guyana and the US on gender violence issues has been strong this year. USAID recently awarded a grant to three civil society organizations to help train officials

to deal with domestic violence. The US embassy has also hosted several international speakers, who addressed issues such as domestic violence and gender equality.

These 16 Days offer an opportunity to renew the commitment to freeing women from the nightmare of violence, whether the abuse occurs in the home behind closed doors, or in the open fields of armed conflict. When women are accorded their rights and afforded equal opportunities in education, healthcare, employment, and political participation, they lift up their families, their communities, and their nations - and act as agents of change. As Secretary Clinton recently noted, "Investing in the potential of the world's women and girls is one of the surest ways to achieve global economic progress, political stability, and greater prosperity for women –and men - the world over."

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