



***Embassy of the United States of America***  
*Port Louis, Mauritius*

**OP-ED**

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INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE  
ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

NOVEMBER 25, 2013

On November 25, the global community commemorates the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence. From the United States to Mauritius, we use this opportunity to show our solidarity in the fight to end violence against women.

Today, I want to add my voice to the long list of international and local government agencies, civil society organizations and individuals who are engaged in this fight - not only as the Ambassador of the United States of America to Mauritius, but also as a woman. I have read too many reports of domestic violence in the year since my arrival here. Stories like that of Madvi Doorgakant, who died with broken ribs and a collapsed lung after suffering constant beatings by her husband during 18 years of marriage, and who was afraid to report the beatings to the police. We must come together now to protect women like Madvi and prevent further domestic violence, so that we can build strong and prosperous societies that value and protect all of their citizens.

According to the World Health Organization, domestic violence affects 30% of women worldwide; 35% of women around the world have been raped or physically abused, and, if this violence occurs at home, 80% of the time it is by a partner or spouse. This violence cuts across ethnic, racial, socio-economic, and religious lines, and knows no borders. It occurs in Mauritius just as it does in the United States and every other nation.

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In Mauritius, a recent research study carried out by Gender Links found that 23% of women have experienced domestic violence, with one in twenty Mauritian women suffering from it in the preceding twelve months. 22% of surveyed Mauritian men admitted to perpetrating domestic violence. Sadly, only three percent of Mauritian women reported domestic violence to the police in that period. From this we can conclude that actual levels of domestic violence in Mauritius are higher than those reported in official statistics.

The consequences and costs of violence against women are immense. 42% of women victims report injuries. Violence by an intimate partner has been linked to many immediate and long-term health outcomes, including physical injury; gynecological disorders; unwanted pregnancy; miscarriage, premature labor, low-birth-weight infants, and stillbirth; sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS; gastrointestinal disorders; chronic pain syndromes like fibromyalgia; sleep difficulties; post-traumatic stress disorder; depression; eating disorders and suicidal behavior. Stress as a result of domestic violence during and around the time of pregnancy has been linked with low-birth-weight infants. Studies have repeatedly highlighted that children raised in a home experiencing domestic violence are more likely to become both perpetrators and victims of domestic violence. We must break this cycle! The 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence offers us an opportunity to renew the global commitment to free women and girls from violence, whether it happens behind closed doors or as a public tactic of intimidation.

We all need to work together — governments, the private sector, civil society — to halt further violence. Many nations have passed legislation addressing domestic violence; the next critical step is to improve implementation of those laws in order to increase accountability and address impunity.

Together, we need to ensure women can get protection. Police and community activists should work together to provide protection. Cultural and religious leaders should work together to prevent violence and change attitudes towards domestic violence. Men and women should work together to overcome the deep-rooted gender inequalities that either tacitly allow or actively promote violent, discriminatory practices.

Ultimately, a shift in our collective thinking is the key to reducing domestic violence. When every daughter is valued as much as her brother, when every woman is viewed as a partner, not a subordinate, then we can say we are making progress. We have a long way to go, but it is possible. It is within our power to create societies that enable all our citizens to feel safe from violence so we can concentrate on building harmony and prosperity for all of us.

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