



Ambassador Lewis Lukens

Podcast

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

Friday, November 25, 2011

Intro statement here.

Ambassador Lukens :

Violence against women and girls touches Senegal just as it does every other nation. Gender-based violence is a global pandemic that can threaten women and girls at any point in their life – from inadequate access to education and nutrition to child marriage, incest, domestic violence, rape, sexual exploitation and abuse, or trafficking in persons. One in three women around the world will experience some form of gender-based violence in her lifetime.

This year, as we mark "16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence," from the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25 through International Human Rights Day on December 10, we are reminded that gender-based violence cannot be treated as solely a women's issue – it is a profound challenge for the entire world. Gender-based violence is not just an affront to human rights and dignity – it deeply affects the welfare of our communities. When women and girls are abused, businesses close, incomes shrink, and families go hungry.

Consider the costs incurred for substantial medical and legal services as a result of injury and abuse. Or calculate the costs of lost household productivity and reduced income stemming from the forfeit of paid working days.

In Uganda, for example, about 12.5 percent of women reported lost time from crucial household work, such as fetching wood for fuel and washing clothes, because of violence from an intimate partner. Nearly 10 percent of these incidents resulted in the women losing an average of 11 paid working days annually. The effects of such costs are exacerbated when the woman is the chief or sole breadwinner for the family.

No country or part of the world is immune to the explicit and implicit costs of gender-based violence. In the United States, the cost of violence against women alone exceeds \$5.8 billion per year. Productivity losses and direct medical and health care service expenditures amount to another \$5.9 billion. That's \$11.7 billion! Not only is gender-based violence morally wrong – we simply cannot afford it!

In Senegal, the United States government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, funds a program to address the preservation of positive traditional practices by engaging grandmothers and female village elders as change agents. This program helps communities create alternate rites-of-passage that do not include Female Genital Cutting.

USAID also tackles issues of school-related gender-based violence, early marriage, and teen pregnancy through a program that provides youth of reproductive age with the necessary “life skills” to enable them to make informed choices and protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and early pregnancy.

These 16 days of activism against gender violence offer an opportunity to renew our commitment to free women and girls from the nightmare of violence.

Countries cannot progress when half their populations are marginalized, mistreated, and discriminated against. When women and girls 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."

Closing statement here.