



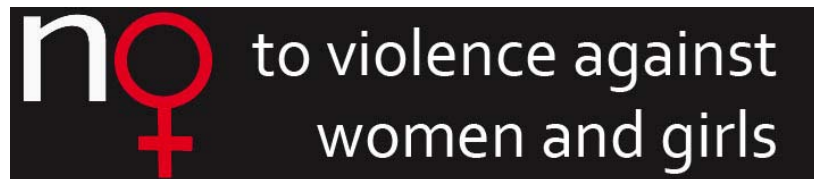
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International Women's Day– 8 March 2009

“Co-operators united to end violence against women and girls”



This year again the United Nations focuses attention on the global pandemic of violence against women and girls. Under the theme, “*Women and men: United to end violence against women and girls*”, International Women's Day underlines the need for governments, civil society, women's organisations, young people, the private sector, the media, the entire UN system, and individual women and men to join forces in putting a halt to violence against women and girls.

Violence against women is truly a global phenomenon despite that fact that many continue to believe that violence to women and girls is prevalent in only very select communities. However as World Bank data confirms, one out of every three women is likely to be beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime. The most common form of violence experienced by women globally is physical violence inflicted by an intimate partner; and women aged 15-44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, motor accidents, war and malaria.

The structural causes of violence against women are rooted in discriminatory customs and traditions. Attitudes and stereotypes including the notion that domestic violence is a private and acceptable matter remain widespread, while economic discrimination of women exacerbates the perpetuation of women's subordinate status in society and this places them at an increased risk of violence.

How can these causes be addressed and by who?

Political will, commitment, investment of resources and leadership at all levels and by all are crucial. Comprehensive measures to secure gender equality and protect women's human rights are necessary for the effective prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women. These include national gender equality action plans; legal frameworks to end impunity, protect women and allow them to equal access to resources (land, credit, etc), prevention; awareness-rising and educational measures especially involving men and boys, and the provision of services and support for victims/survivors.

The Co-operative Movement, representing more than 800 million women and men co-operators around the world, is called today to mobilise and play a stronger role to end violence against women and girls! They can do so by promoting gender equality in their own co-operative structures, but also taking a leadership in their communities to change attitudes, making political representations and ensuring that action is taken to make violence against women and girls a thing of the past.

ICA and its Gender Equality Committee wish to underline the important contribution made by the worldwide co-operative movement in creating a culture of mutual respect and its commitment to remove all forms of discrimination. All over the world, co-operatives contribute to challenge the structural causes of violence, through implementing gender equality policy and programmes, providing co-operators with awareness-raising, training and education, decent work and socio-economic empowerment for women and girls in and through co-operatives, etc. Moreover, co-operatives are also relevant actors for supporting victims with services and social inclusion opportunities.

Co-operatives can start making a difference by simply removing all obstacles that prevent or limit the direct membership and active participation of women in all types of co-operatives. This means seriously reviewing co-operative bye-laws, policies, standing orders and even internal practice to ensure that real opportunities are available to women to improve their socio-economic status and by doing so in turn contribute the success of their co-operatives while empowering themselves.

On the 8th March 2009, International Women's Day, we call on ICA member organisations and co-operators, to further mobilise their socio-economic strength by contributing in this global struggle against all forms of violence against women and girls.

Let us aim high and be leaders of change in our societies.

Ivano Barberini.
President, ICA

Stefania Marcone
Chair, ICA Gender Equality Committee

The International Co-operative Alliance is an independent, non-government association which unities, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. The ICA was founded in London in 1895. Its members are national and international co-operative organisations in all sectors of activity including, agricultural, banking, fisheries, housing, tourism, and consumer co-operatives. ICA has more than 221 member organisations from 85 countries, representing more than 800 million individuals worldwide.