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**I-VAWA INTRODUCED IN
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Groundbreaking legislation to address the global crisis of violence against women and girls was introduced in the House of Representatives on April 30 by Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman (D-CA). The *International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA – HR 5927)* would apply the force of U.S. diplomacy and foreign aid over five years toward preventing abuse and exploitation, which is estimated to affect one in three women worldwide.

I-VAWA authorizes more than \$200 million annually in foreign assistance for international programs that prevent violence, support health programs and survivor services, encourage legal accountability and change public attitudes, promote access to economic opportunity and education, and better address violence against women in humanitarian situations. It would deal with preventing violence in all of its forms, including honor killings, bride burnings, acid burnings, dowry deaths, genital mutilation, mass rapes in war, or domestic violence. The legislation (S. 2279) was introduced in the Senate last October by the bipartisan leadership team of Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Richard Lugar (R-IN).

“Now that the *International Violence Against Women Act* has been introduced in both chambers, we will make its enactment a major priority,” said Family Violence Prevention Fund President Esta Soler. “Day after day, we are horrified by reports of brutal violence being committed against women and children worldwide. This legislation can help our country make a difference and take a stronger stand. We

won't rest until it becomes law.”

“Violence against women is an egregious human rights violation which affects all aspects of women's lives, from their personal health and safety to their ability to earn a living and care for their families,” said Ritu Sharma Fox, co-founder and president of Women Thrive Worldwide, formerly the Women's Edge Coalition. “This historic bill will enable our country to help lift one of the major barriers to women's empowerment worldwide.”

The legislation was introduced in the House shortly after Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) brought more than 200 activists, including Betty Makoni a former high school teacher from Zimbabwe, to Capitol Hill to talk to lawmakers about violence against women. Makoni told *Voice of America News*, “Everybody's daughter is at risk, so our initial point of interest is to make sure everybody is aware that the problem is cross-cutting, regardless of political position, religious affiliation, or social status.”

The Legislation

In 2005, the Family Violence Prevention Fund, Amnesty International USA and Women Thrive Worldwide convened meetings to develop the legislation, recognizing that violence is a worldwide problem that needs to be addressed in a comprehensive way, and that stand-alone programs are not enough. More than 150 U.S.-based experts including 40 women's groups overseas gave advice on the bill. More than 60 human rights, women's, humanitarian, development and faith-based organizations support it.

The bill would develop strategies in

countries around the world for U.S. programs to address violence against women and girls. It creates the first high level U.S. State Department office working explicitly on violence against women, increasing diplomatic attention to violence against women and girls. The coordinator would seek to integrate best practices in violence prevention across the government's diplomatic and foreign assistance work, while adding financial support for local health programs and reform efforts.

For example, the legislation calls for funding to support locally led efforts to reform practices and change social attitudes that condone violence against women and girls, better address this violence in humanitarian assistance programs, and train lawyers and police on how to better deal with domestic violence cases. It also supports local efforts by bolstering the work of women's organizations overseas that are already working to end violence against women in their countries.

I-VAWA would also decrease potential sexual exploitation and abuse by U.S. humanitarian workers, military personnel, military contractors and police involved in peacekeeping operations by creating training programs to prevent such abuse and a complaints mechanism for reporting problems.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women estimates that at least one of every three women globally will be beaten, raped, or otherwise abused during her lifetime.

For more information on the International Violence Against Women Act, please visit www.endabuse.org/programs/display.php3?DocID=321 and to take action to support it, visit <http://action.endabuse.org/fypf/home/>.