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**SPECIAL ISSUE: The  
International Violence Against  
Women Act**

Groundbreaking legislation to combat the global crisis of violence against women and girls was introduced in the United States Senate on October 31st by Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Richard Lugar (R-IN). The *International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA)* would, for the first time, systematically integrate efforts to end gender-based violence into foreign assistance programs, applying the force of U.S. diplomacy and foreign aid totaling \$1 billion over five years to prevent the abuse and exploitation that affects up to one in three women worldwide.

"The *International Violence Against Women Act* marshals together, for the first time, coordinated American resources and leadership to address this global issue. I believe the time is now for the United States to get actively engaged in the fight for women's lives and girls' futures, and we must begin by preventing and responding to the violence they face," Senator Biden said.

"It is essential for the United States to work with non-governmental organizations and like-minded countries to end domestic violence," Senator Lugar added. "No woman, regardless of her income or education level, should live in fear or be made to believe that physical or emotional abuse is acceptable. We cannot expect to reduce poverty and decrease the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS until we have more equitable treatment of women in developing countries. Empowered and educated women are the key to breaking these cycles."

In 2005, the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF), Women's Edge Coalition and Amnesty International USA convened

meetings to develop the legislation, recognizing the need for a comprehensive worldwide approach that looks at separate challenges facing different countries depending on the form the violence takes in each. More than 150 U.S.-based experts and 40 women's groups overseas gave advice on the bill.

**Major Components of I-VAWA**

The new legislation would authorize more than \$200 million annually in foreign assistance for international programs that prevent violence, support health programs and survivor services, encourage legal accountability, change public attitudes, promote access to economic opportunity projects and education, and address violence against women in humanitarian situations. It aims to prevent domestic and sexual violence, including "honor" killings, bride burnings, genital cutting, mass rapes in war, and more.

To deal with situations like the Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo, it would require the Secretary of State to identify critical outbreaks of violence against women and girls in armed conflict and develop emergency measures to respond to these outbreaks. These measures would include efforts by the United States government to protect women and girls, to urge all parties in the conflict to protect women and girls, and to facilitate prosecution of perpetrators.

More specifically, *I-VAWA* has three main components. It:

1. **Creates one central Office for Women's Global Initiatives** to coordinate the United States' policies, programs and resources that deal with women's issues. Never before has such a high-level office been created to report directly to the Secretary of State on issues related to

gender-based violence and the needs of women and girls.

2. **Mandates a five-year comprehensive strategy to fight violence against women in 10 to 20 selected countries and provides a new, dedicated funding stream of \$175 million a year to support programs dealing with violence against women in five areas:** the criminal and civil justice system, healthcare, girls' access to education and school safety, women's economic empowerment, and public awareness campaigns.
3. **Requires training, reporting mechanisms and a system for dealing with women and girls afflicted by violence during humanitarian, conflict and post-conflict operations.** As the recent reports from the Democratic Republic of Congo make tragically clear, in situations of humanitarian crises, conflict and post-conflict operations, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to violence. Reports of refugee women being raped while collecting firewood, soldiers sexually abusing girls in exchange for token food items, or women subjected to unimaginable brutality and torture as a tactic of war are shocking in number and inhumanity. There is a dire need for increased training and reporting requirements for refugee workers to help crack down on these brutal acts of violence. In addition, the bill crafts a new designation of "critical outbreaks" and requires emergency measures when rape is used as a weapon of war or in conflicts where violence against women is sharply escalating with impunity.

*I-VAWA* would integrate training to change attitudes that condone violence against women and girls into humanitarian assistance programs, and train lawyers and police to deal with domestic violence cases. It also bolsters women's organizations overseas that are already working to end violence against women in their countries.

The legislation would 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.

### Reaction

"Every day around the world, women and girls suffer brutal domestic violence, rape, honor killings, bride burnings, violence as a weapon of war, and other atrocities," said FVVPF President Esta Soler. "Violence against women is a devastating problem, from Africa and the Middle East, to South and Central America, to right here in the United States. *I-VAWA* is critically important legislation that can help stop the violence women and girls experience each day. We are enormously grateful to Senators Biden and Lugar for introducing it. We intend to put the same energy and resources into enacting *I-VAWA* that we put into the *Violence Against Women Act*. It's time to do much more to protect women and children worldwide."

"Violence is one of the biggest barriers to women's economic participation. It's hard to work if you fear for your life," said Women's Edge Coalition co-founder and president Ritu Sharma Fox. "This legislation will ensure that hard-earned tax dollars support efforts to end this scourge, and that violence does not prevent women from going to work, getting an education and supporting their families."

"Violence devastates the lives of millions of women and girls and their families worldwide," said AIUSA Executive Director Larry Cox. "We have seen the terrible consequences of mass rapes in Bosnia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere. We grieve with the mothers in Juárez whose daughters are victims of an ongoing femicide. Violence against women, whether in the home or in armed conflict, destabilizes communities, undermines economic development and breeds poverty and despair."

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## OUTREACH

*Last month Senators Biden and Lugar introduced the International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA). Journalists and bloggers are covering the bill's introduction and advocates may have a chance to comment in interviews, write a letter-to-the-editor, submit an oped (guest editorial), or get involved in an online discussion by commenting on blogs. Do not miss a chance to generate support for I-VAWA and help keep women and children around the world safe. Talking points, sample web text, a fill in the blanks letter-to-the-editor, a sample oped and a letter/email to your Members of Congress follow. Please contact Speaking Up editor Luci Manning at 202/371-1999 or [speakingup@prsolutionsdc.com](mailto:speakingup@prsolutionsdc.com) if you need help making a media list or have questions about using any of the following tools.*

### Talking Points

- If the bipartisan *International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA)* becomes law, the U.S. will be doing much more to stop the global crisis of violence against women and girls.
- Violence against women is a tremendous human rights problem around the world. It includes rape, domestic violence, acid burning, dowry deaths, "honor killings," human trafficking, female genital cutting and more. Experts estimate that up to one in three women will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetimes, with rates reaching 70 percent in some countries.
- *I-VAWA* is designed to give victims of violence more support, hold perpetrators accountable, empower women, and support new efforts to change cultural norms that support or condone violence.
- The legislation would do this by expanding the U.S. government's ability to raise gender-based violence with foreign governments as part of its diplomatic relations, and by integrating efforts to end gender-based violence into all existing, appropriate U.S. foreign assistance programs with a special emphasis on supporting the overseas women's groups that work each day to stop violence.
- The U.S. is already reaching millions of women through its foreign assistance: for example, through public health programs that educate women on how to protect themselves and their families against HIV-AIDS and malaria and through micro-credit programs that help women take out small loans to start their own businesses. *I-VAWA* will make these and other foreign assistance programs more efficient and better for women and families around the world.
- In addition to being a human rights violation, violence against women destabilizes countries and impedes economic progress and stability. Americans want their government to do more to stop this violence. Passing *I-VAWA* is essential if the U.S. is to take a stronger stand against the violence that harms so many women and girls worldwide.

## Sample Letter to Your Senators

[Date]

Dear Senator [Name],

I am writing to urge you to co-sponsor the *International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA)* – groundbreaking legislation that would help combat the global crisis of violence against women and girls.

This essential legislation, introduced last month by Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Richard Lugar (R-IN), would incorporate and make consistent efforts to reduce violence against women and girls in U.S. foreign assistance programs.

By addressing violence against girls in school, encouraging legal reform, working to change public attitudes, and supporting health programs and survivor services, especially in crisis situations, and promoting women’s economic opportunity, *I-VAWA* could have a real impact.

We all feel so helpless when we read about what’s happening to women and girls in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and elsewhere. This legislation would make a difference and step up our government’s work to stop this violence and keep women and children safe. Please co-sponsor the *International Violence Against Women Act*.

Sincerely,

[Your name, organization, email address and telephone number]

## Sample Blog Post

*Speaking Up urges readers to become active consumers of newspaper and broadcast media stories. Nearly all media outlets have websites on which they post stories, and often there is a place to comment at the end of those stories. The next time you see a story that addresses what is happening in the Sudan or the Democratic Republic of Congo, or violence against women elsewhere in the world, consider going online and posting a comment. Following is some text you can use. Then check back to see what others are saying, and stay involved in the conversation if there is a chance to do so.*

[Begin with a sentence on what the story is about, for example: The news from Darfur is so grim, and it’s hard to find ways to help – but there is something we can do.] U.S. Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) recently introduced groundbreaking legislation to combat the global crisis of violence against women and girls. The [International Violence Against Women Act](http://www.womensedge.org/images/ivawafullbill.pdf) ([www.womensedge.org/images/ivawafullbill.pdf](http://www.womensedge.org/images/ivawafullbill.pdf)) (*I-VAWA*) would, for the first time, integrate efforts to end gender-based violence into foreign assistance programs, applying the force of U.S. diplomacy and foreign aid totaling \$1 billion over five years to prevent the abuse and exploitation that affects up to one in three women worldwide.

In 2005, the [Family Violence Prevention Fund](http://www.endabuse.org) ([www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)) (FVPF), [Women’s Edge Coalition](http://www.womensedge.org) ([www.womensedge.org](http://www.womensedge.org)) and [Amnesty International USA](http://www.amnestyusa.org) ([www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org))

convened meetings to develop the legislation, recognizing the need for a comprehensive worldwide approach that looks at separate challenges depending on the form the violence takes in different countries. More than 150 U.S.-based experts and 40 women's groups overseas gave advice on the bill. It would authorize more than \$200 million annually in foreign assistance for international programs that prevent violence, support health programs and survivor services, encourage legal accountability, change public attitudes, promote access to economic opportunity projects and education, and address violence against women in humanitarian situations. It aims to prevent domestic and sexual violence, including "honor" killings, bride burnings, genital cutting, mass rapes in war, and more.

More information on *I-VAWA* is available [here](#).

(<http://endabuse.org/newsflash/index.php3?Search=Article&NewsFlashID=931>) We should all urge Congress to pass it right away.

### **Sample Letter-to-the-Editor**

*The following letter is designed for advocates to distribute to a local newspaper - please make whatever changes you can to personalize or localize it, and submit it to just one daily or weekly newspaper in your market. Speaking Up readers in Delaware and Indiana should modify the letter to thank Senators Biden and Lugar for sponsoring I-VAWA.*

[Date]

To The Editor:

We all read about the horrors in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere, and feel helpless to stop the terrible violence against women and girls that seems to get worse every day. But now there is something we can do. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, as "Domestic Violence Awareness Month" was ending, Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) took a major step to protect women and girls around the world by introducing the *International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA)*, which would give our government powerful new tools to combat the global crisis of violence against women.

This legislation would: support efforts to change attitudes on violence against women; create a central office to coordinate the United States' policies, programs and resources that deal with women's issues; provide a funding stream to support programs working to end violence against women around the world; support health programs and survivor services, especially in crisis situations; and more.

Violence against women is a tremendous human rights problem. Experts estimate that up to one in three women will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetimes, with rates reaching 70 percent in some countries. *I-VAWA* can make a difference by giving victims more support, holding perpetrators accountable, empowering women, and supporting new efforts to change cultural norms that support or condone violence.

I hope everyone who wants violence against women and girls to stop will support this legislation, and encourage both our Senators to join Senators Biden and Lugar in doing so as well.

Sincerely,

[Your name, title, organization, and telephone number (not for publication)]

## Sample Oped (Guest Editorial)

*Please consider submitting this oped piece to a local daily or weekly newspaper, after inserting a paragraph of information (see bracketed section below) and making whatever other changes are appropriate for your agency. It should not be submitted to the same paper to which you submit the letter to the editor.*

### **Congress Should Pass the *International Violence Against Women Act***

By [name]

How often do you feel helpless when hearing about the violence in Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo? Read about young women murdered by family members for perceived dishonor in the Middle East? See a report on rape and domestic violence victims unable to find the services they need in Latin America? Become horrified by reports of soldiers using rape as a weapon of war in eastern Europe or elsewhere?

The United Nations Development Fund for Women estimates that one of every three women around the world will be beaten, raped, or otherwise abused during her lifetime. A 2005 World Health Organization study based on interviews with 24,000 women around the world found that 20-75 percent of women – depending on the country – had experienced physical or sexual violence since age 15.

Violence against women and girls is a global crisis, costing us too much in lost potential, limited prospects – and lost lives. We haven't yet done nearly enough to stop this violence – but we can do better. There are solutions.

One of them is legislative. The bipartisan *International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA)* was introduced in Congress by Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) in late October. This groundbreaking bill can do a tremendous amount to help end domestic and sexual violence around the world.

The new legislation would authorize more than \$200 million annually in foreign assistance for international programs that prevent violence, support health programs and survivor services, encourage legal accountability, change public attitudes, promote access to economic opportunity projects and education, and address violence against women in humanitarian situations.

It would create one central Office for Women's Global Initiatives to coordinate the United States' policies, programs and resources that deal with women's issues; mandate a five-year comprehensive strategy to fight violence against women in 10 to 20 selected countries and provide a new, dedicated funding stream to support programs dealing with violence against women; require training, reporting mechanisms and a system for dealing with women and girls afflicted by violence during humanitarian, conflict and post-conflict operations; and more.

*I-VAWA* would integrate training to change attitudes that condone violence against women and girls into humanitarian assistance programs, train lawyers and police to deal with domestic violence cases, and bolster existing women's organizations overseas that are already working to end violence against women in their countries.

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*I-VAWA* is the logical next step after the domestic *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)*. First passed in 1994 and reauthorized twice since, it was a giant step forward for our nation. Its passage meant that we finally acknowledged that domestic and sexual violence cause tremendous harm, and put real resources into helping victims. Millions of women, children and families are better off as a result.

Because of *VAWA*, [insert local data, how many people your program serves and note what your *VAWA* funding allows you to in terms of prevention and serving victims– in 100 words or so.]

Now, we must continue this work so that families worldwide can benefit. Americans want to help. A recent men's public opinion poll commissioned by the Family Violence Prevention Fund, with support from Verizon Wireless, found that more than 60 percent of men think the government is not doing enough to raise awareness and address domestic violence and sexual assault. *I-VAWA* is a way to do just that.

Violence against women is a human rights violation. Join us in asking lawmakers to support this ground-breaking legislation now, so we can make the world safe for many more women and girls.

*[Author] is [title] of [organization.]*