



National Task Force
to End Sexual and
Domestic Violence Against Women

Violence against women is *never* a game!

Congress must ensure that persons making online threats of assault, sexual violence and death are held accountable. WE NEED YOUR STORIES!!!

#stalkingisnogame

October 29, 2014 – please distribute widely!

Trigger warning: rape, murder, violence; this alert contains disturbing and offensive language

On October 15, feminist critic Anita Sarkeesian, nationally known for her efforts to call out violence against women in online gaming, was forced to cancel a speaking appearance at Utah State University when the school received an anonymous email threatening to carry out "the deadliest shooting in American history"^[i] if the event was not cancelled. The email was only one of a long history of online threats and harassment directed at Sarkeesian. She, like other activists against online gender-based violence, has been forced to move out of her home. The FBI only recently took on her case; they, like many other law enforcement agencies, face many barriers to effectively investigating online threats of sexual and physical violence, and often, cyberviolence/online stalking is not a priority.

Congress must act to ensure that our laws keep pace with growing online violence and to ensure law enforcement has access to the tools necessary to enforce those laws. We will ask Congress to hold a hearing on cyberviolence/online stalking – we need your stories!

Background: Sarkeesian and two female video game developers, Zoe Quinn and Brianna Wu are at the center of "Gamergate", a culture war within the video game community. A tiny subset of video game fans are attacking people who critique the misogynistic content of many video games; these trolls claim to be [policing journalistic ethics](#) by threatening Sarkeesian, Quinn and Wu with rape, torture and death.^[ii] The following is just one of many threats aimed at Sarkeesian: "I'm going to kill your parents . . . I've seen their house [her parents' address]. . . I'm going to go to your apartment at [her home address]. . . and rape you to death. After I'm done, I'll ram a tire iron up your c%^t".^[iii] These women, and many, many more in this country, deal with threats like this *every day*. Trolls have hacked their computers and posted personal information and nude photos online. They have been forced out of their homes and into hiding.

Law Enforcement's Response: In many jurisdictions, law enforcement does not have the expertise required to investigate cases of online violence. Many of the people perpetrating such violence are able to electronically hide their tracks, requiring law enforcement to invest much time and effort into investigating these cyberstalking incidents. Furthermore, the penalties for cyberstalking are laughable. As Tim Ryan, a former FBI investigator puts it, "Spending a month getting subpoenas and doing wiretaps for a case where the sentence is six months of probation just doesn't make sense".^[iv] Another expert adds, "Our legal system hasn't quite caught up with technology".^[v]

Cyberstalking victimization is not confined to celebrities and the gaming world; anyone who uses the Internet can be a target. We can use Gamergate to start a conversation, but we need to illustrate the pervasive nature of cyberstalking in our culture. **We are asking Congress to hold hearings on cyberviolence/online stalking, and we need stories from constituents to show Congress how important this issue is.** Share your story with us so we can prove the magnitude of the problem!

ACTION!! SHARE YOUR STORIES WITH US!!! EMAIL US AT ntfvawa@gmail.com. PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR STATE BUT NO OTHER IDENTIFYING INFORMATION!

Have you or someone you know been the target of virulent online/electronic harassment and/or threats? How has that impacted you and/or the target? Did you contact law enforcement and, if so, what was their response? Your stories are important!

If you are a member of law enforcement, have you tried but been unable to investigate cyberviolence/online stalking? What were the barriers you faced? Your stories are important!

Your stories will be kept anonymous. The only identifying information we will use is your state, because every legislator needs to know this is happening to his/her constituents!

SOCIAL MEDIA!!! POST THIS ALERT ON SOCIAL MEDIA OR DISCUSS GAMERGATE ONLINE!

#trollslose

#stalkingisnogame

#stopcyberviolence

Follow us on Twitter at [@NTFVAWA](https://twitter.com/NTFVAWA) and "like" our Facebook page. If you aren't on one of the VAWA email lists or want to add members of your staff or state/community leaders to our grassroots alerts e-mailing list, send names and contact information including email to ntfvawaalerts@icasa.org.

A primer on Gamergate: <http://deadspin.com/the-future-of-the-culture-wars-is-here-and-its-gamerga-1646145844>

Analysis of gender-based online abuse: <http://www.psmag.com/navigation/health-and-behavior/women-arent-welcome-internet-72170/>

Sarkeesian's critique of misogyny in video games:
<http://www.feministfrequency.com/tag/tropes-vs-women-in-video-games/>

Democracy Now's interview with Sarkeesian:
<http://www.democracynow.org/shows/2014/10/20>

Why it's difficult to prosecute trolls:
http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/10/17/gamergate_threats_why_it_s_so_hard_to_prosecute_the_people_targeting_zoe.html?wpsrc=fol_tw

http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/survey-harassment-a-common-part-of-online-life/2014/10/22/497f7330-59f4-11e4-9d6c-756a229d8b18_story.html

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- [i] Goodwin, A. (2014). "Women are being driven offline": Feminist Anita Sarkeesian terrorized for critique of video games. *Democracy Now*. Retrieved from <http://www.democracynow.org/shows/2014/10/20>.
- [ii] Wagner, K. (2014). The future of the culture wars is here, and it's Gamergate. *Deadspin*. Retrieved from <http://deadspin.com/the-future-of-the-culture-wars-is-here-and-its-gamerga-1646145844>.
- [iii] Beusman, C. (2014). Misogynistic trolls drive feminist video game critic from her home. *Jezebel*. Retrieved from <http://jezebel.com/misogynistic-trolls-drive-feminist-video-game-critic-fr-1627923562>.
- [iv] Hess, A. (2014). A former FBI agent on why it is so hard to prosecute Gamergate trolls. *Slate*. Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/10/17/gamergate_threats_why_it_s_so_hard_to_prosecute_the_people_targeting_zoe.html?wpsrc=fol_tw.
- [v] Ortutay, B. (2014, October 22). Survey: Harassment a common part of online life. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/survey-harassment-a-common-part-of-online-life/2014/10/22/497f7330-59f4-11e4-9d6c-756a229d8b18_story.html.