

International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA) S. 2279

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.

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.]