

**The International Violence Against Women Act**  
**October 31, 2007**

MR. BIDEN. Mr. President, one in three women worldwide will experience gender-based violence in her lifetime. In some countries, that's true for 70 percent of women. No country is immune. From trafficking of women in Eastern Europe to "honor" killings in Jordan to rape being used as a brutal weapon of war in Darfur and the Congo, violence against women and girls crosses all borders and affects women in all social groups, religions and socio-economic classes.

Around the globe, women and girls face domestic violence, rape, forced or child marriage, so-called "honor" killings, dowry-related murder, human trafficking, and female genital mutilation. The United Nations estimates that at least 5,000 "honor" killings take place each year around the world and more than 130,000,000 girls and young women worldwide have been subjected to genital mutilation. A 2006 United Nations Report found that at least 102 member states had no specific laws on domestic violence. The statistics are staggering.

Not surprisingly, violence against women and girls has a profound impact on the health and development of countries worldwide. Violence breeds poverty. It impedes economic development because it can prevent girls from going to school, or stop women from holding jobs or inheriting property, or shut down access to critical health care for themselves and their children. We can't eradicate poverty and disease unless we prevent and respond to the violence women face in their own homes and communities. And we cannot truly empower women to become active in civic life and promote peace, prosperity and democracy unless they personally are free from fear of violence.

Violence against women is a global health crisis, not just because so many women and girls are injured and die as a result, but also because inequality and violence interfere with current efforts to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Forced sex increases vulnerability to HIV/AIDS transmission, in part, because condoms are not likely to be used. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, women account for close to three-quarters of those living with HIV-AIDS between the ages 18 and 24.

The picture is grim, and can be discouraging. But the good news is that local and international organizations are working in communities around the world with courage, sensitivity and great success to help women overcome violence at home, in school and at work. But they need our help.

We've made tremendous progress in reducing violence against women here in the United States since we passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 1994. That important work continues. But we cannot ignore the devastation wrought by violence in every corner of the globe. Now is the time to turn our attention to women in other parts of the world – women whose lives are devastated by poverty, political and civic exclusion, disease, and violence. Gender-based violence contributes to the poverty, inequality and instability that threaten peace. Addressing it isn't just moral; it's also smart.

So today, during this final week of Domestic Awareness Month, I am introducing with my good friend from Indiana, Senator Lugar, the *International Violence Against Women Act* (“IVAWA”). This groundbreaking, bipartisan legislation would integrate efforts to end gender-based violence into all existing, appropriate U.S. foreign assistance programs.

The International Violence Against Women Act has three main components. First, the bill reorganizes and rejuvenates the gender-related efforts of the State Department by creating one central office – the “Office for Women’s Global Initiatives”, directed by a Senate-confirmed Ambassador who reports directly to the Secretary. The Coordinator of the Office of Women’s Global Initiatives (the “Coordinator”) will be charged with monitoring, coordinating, and organizing all U.S. resources, programs and aid abroad that deals with women’s issues, including gender-based violence. Additionally, my bill creates a new Office of Women’s Global Development at USAID, also to be directed by a Senate-confirmed nominee. The Director will be responsible for addressing gender-based violence and integrating gender into U.S. government assistance programs. The Director will work closely with the Coordinator and the Secretary of State to implement the provisions of the IVAWA legislation.

Under the current organizational scheme, projects addressing violence against women, either primarily or tangentially, are spread throughout the State Department and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) without a central inventory, game plan or leader. My bill will raise the profile of women’s issues generally at the State Department, and ensure that gender-based violence programs are building on past successes, leveraging core competencies and working in conjunction with other initiatives.

Second, the International Violence Against Women Act mandates creation of a 5-year, comprehensive strategy, with coordinated programming, to prevent and respond to violence against women in 10 to 20 targeted countries. The Act creates a 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 (everything from drafting laws on domestic violence, to enhancing women’s access to property and inheritance rights, to reforming police practices), health care, girls’ access to education and school safety, women’s access to employment and financial resources, and public awareness campaigns that change social norms.

I know from my experience in Delaware that coordinating community responses in towns and cities has made all the difference in fighting domestic violence and rape. I applied those same principles of coordination and joint programming to the International Violence Against Women Act. International experts agree on the necessity of a multi-disciplinary approach that brings governments and nongovernmental organizations to the table to create sustainable infrastructure. To be clear, the International Violence Against Women Act is not asking countries to reinvent the wheel. At every step our strategy will lead to coordination of efforts to have the greatest possible impact. This type of effective, cost-efficient, gender-based violence programming already exists and is taking place in pockets all around the globe. We have the blueprints; my Act would provide the momentum and support for a full-scale international priority.

Finally, as the recent reports from the Congo make tragically clear, in situations of humanitarian crises, conflict and post-conflict operations, women and girls are vulnerable to horrific acts of

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. The Act requires training, reporting mechanisms and other measures for those who are working directly with or protecting refugees and other vulnerable populations. The Act also requires that the State Department identify “critical outbreaks” in which violence against women and girls is being used as a weapon of intimidation and abuse in armed conflict or war, or is escalating in an environment of impunity, and to take emergency measures to respond to the outbreaks.

The issue of violence against women and girls is complex and our legislation is a bold and ambitious plan. There are limitations on the United States’ power to “fix” a problem that is so widespread. We are mindful that no country has a perfect record or all the answers. Yet Congress has a long and proud history of tackling complex international problems, most recently the devastating epidemic of HIV/AIDS and the insidious crime of human trafficking.

I did not approach this legislation lightly. Over the past months, I’ve solicited information from every relevant office in the State Department, USAID and the Department of Justice that works on the issues of women’s rights and gender-based violence abroad. I asked for input and information from the United Nations secretariat, and many of its subsidiary agencies who are working to prevent and respond to gender-based violence internationally in various capacities. And most importantly, the International Violence Against Women Act was drafted with the insight and expertise of over 100 nongovernmental organizations and 40 women’s groups around the globe, including American Refugee Committee, Amnesty International, CARE, Christian Children’s Fund, Family Violence Prevention Fund, Global AIDS Alliance, Human Rights Watch, Inter-Agency Gender Working Group (IGWG), International Rescue Committee, International Justice Mission, Women’s Edge Coalition, Vital Voices Global Partnership and many others. I thank all of them for their invaluable assistance and perseverance as this bill came together.

Former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan said “Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. And it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equity, development and peace.” I could not agree more. My International Violence Against Women Act marshals together, for the first time, coordinated American resources, good will 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.

Over the past thirty years, the understanding of human rights and violence against women has metamorphosed. A state’s responsibility to protect women from violence has evolved - what was once seen largely as a private, family or cultural matter is now understood by the international community as a violation of basic human rights. Violence against women is a legal wrong. It cannot be excused or justified or ignored. It is an engrained social norm but one that we can dismantle over time – one woman at a time – with patience, creativity and sustained political will. The International Violence Against Women Act is the first step.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a full section-by-section description of the International Violence Against Women Act and the text of the bill be inserted into the *Record* after my remarks.