

# VIOLENCE FREE LIVES FOR WOMEN

Quarterly Update of the 'We Can' Campaign

## Message



Allison Aldred, Regional Director,  
Oxfam GB, South Asia

Violence against women will end only when entrenched social attitudes that accept violence against women as 'normal', and the belief that women are fundamentally of less value than men, are challenged.

In South Asia, where one in two women faces violence in their daily lives, we believe that involving communities is critical in changing prevailing attitudes and that it is necessary to involve both men and women to prevent, and ultimately end, abuse against women.

The South Asia campaign to end violence against women in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan (the We Can campaign) will work with communities in each of these countries, and in the region as a whole, over the next six years to reduce the social acceptance of violence against women - through an 'awareness-to-action' programme.

Change makers (people who will actively encourage more positive attitudes and behaviour towards women, within the communities in which they live and work) will play an essential role in building a people-based movement to end violence against women.

Another important aspect of the campaign is our aspiration to unite individuals and organisations -- that are making positive, but often unrelated, efforts to protect and empower women facing violence -- in order to achieve, together, a greater impact. This will include linking together work and groups at the local, national and regional levels.

Civil society groups, government agencies, celebrities and a wide range of other types of organisations: universities and educational institutions, media and informal communication networks and private sector firms will also be enlisted.

Through this quarterly newsletter we hope to reach out to each one of you with news and updates of this campaign and reaffirm the campaign's belief that Together We Can End Violence Against Women. We welcome suggestions and feedback so that the campaign evolves into a true people's campaign. Please do send comments to [secretariat@wecanendvaw.org](mailto:secretariat@wecanendvaw.org)

**We  
can**

**South Asia regional campaign**



end all violence against women

Volume 1, November 2004

## CAMPAIGN UPDATE

### Bangladesh Launch

"The thousands of village women gathered here show that women want to be empowered," said Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, Bangladesh State Minister for Agriculture, at the launch of the national campaign to end violence against women, organised by *Polli Sree*, a prominent NGO in the country on September 18 2004 in Dinajpur. The event was also attended by campaign partners, government representatives, activists, media, members from all South Asian Oxfam programmes and people from different walks of life.

The Bangladesh campaign is being led by an alliance comprising Oxfam and its partners that include *Polli Sree* (Dinajpur), *Gono Ummoyon Kendro* (Gaibandha), *Rupantor* (Khulna), Social Development Society (Barisal), *Manav Mukti Sansthan* (Sirajganj), OWDEB (Chittagong), *Banchte Chai* (Pabna) and the Gender and Development Alliance.

Post-launch there have been mass gatherings and processions in Dinajpur, Gaibandha, Sirajganj, Pabna, Khulna, Bagerhat, Barisal and Chittagong, both to raise awareness and to rally support for the campaign. Thousands of individuals and an alliance of 148 civil society organisations have joined efforts to say that together 'we can' empower women the right to live a violence-free life.

Gender and Development Alliance, a network of 140 NGOs, is now holding 15 seminars on 'Domestic Violence and its Consequences' to promote public discourse on the 'private' matter of domestic violence.



Boat rally at Sirajganj, Bangladesh

1 out of  
2 women in  
South Asia  
faces violence

### Sri Lanka Launch

An island-wide campaign to end violence against women, particularly domestic violence, was launched on 24 September 2004 in Colombo. It was attended by the partners of the campaign, NGOs, parliamentarians, journalists and people from a wide cross section of the society. The national launch has been followed by launches in Batticaloa and Ampara on October 9 and 11, 2004 respectively.

Developed by a host of community organisations working all over the country, the Sri Lanka campaign will mobilise 10,000 people across the country to take a public stand against domestic violence by December 2004 and influence 50,000 people more indirectly.

The campaign's overall objective is to bring about a perceptible change in current gender-biased attitudes and practices.

The campaign strategy has been chalked out by a steering committee that consists of ten national NGOs and a National Alliance that comprises a larger group of NGOs and community-based organisations. In a new and exciting development, Sri Lanka's Prisons Department has come forward to support the campaign and will work as an ally to reduce violence against women.



Her Excellency President  
Chandrika Bandaranaike  
Kumaratunga's Message

In Sri Lanka, it is estimated that around 60 per cent of the women are subject to domestic violence. The pervasive culture of domestic violence has eroded women's fundamental rights to life, security, bodily integrity, work, and safety at home.

We need to work together to increase awareness of the problems of women, thereby creating an enabling environment that would promote violence free homes for all.



## Website/Communication Material

A website to provide campaign information in the six South Asian countries has been developed ([www.wecanendvaw.org](http://www.wecanendvaw.org)).

A briefing paper and brochure have been published to set out the campaign position. A strategy paper to outline the campaign approach and methodology will be published soon.

"The campaign launch in Bangladesh was a wonderful experience. The manner in which people were mobilised, partners brought together and innovative ideas translated into reality reflects the hard work of our colleagues in Dhaka."  
**A Mehmood and Ayesha Ayub, Oxfam GB, Pakistan**

"The high rate of child sexual abuse and the vulnerability of women in the current conflict situation in the country make the Sri Lanka campaign very significant."  
**Sujeewa, Police Officer at the Women and Children's Desk, Ampara, Sri Lanka**

"People do not want me to write about domestic violence. They think it should not be discussed openly as it concerns a family's honour. But it impacts the society negatively and the press must report it."  
**Chitto Ghosh, President, Dinajpur Press Club, Bangladesh**

"I am really grateful that Oxfam and *Polli Sree* are doing what my ministry and I should be doing to give women their due."  
**Md. Mortuza Hossain Munshi, Secretary-in-charge, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of Bangladesh**

"The district launches have enabled grassroots participation, created an ownership towards the campaign, strengthened the commitment of the alliance partners and demonstrated the concern of the media."  
**Bimba Bhattarai, Oxfam GB, Nepal**

**Shamim Ara Begum, Director, *Polli Sree*, Bangladesh**

"Domestic violence affects 47 per cent of Bangladeshi women. The plight of women cannot be changed by just enacting state laws and international agreements. Only strategies that actively involve community members as change agents can help curb violence against women. Men and women working together can help get domestic violence recognised as a crisis by bringing it into the public domain. Together, they can also find solutions to it.

The Bangladesh campaign has made us realise that we at *Polli Sree* are not alone. Our efforts to end domestic violence will be supported by numerous organisations-both within our country and in South Asia. We fully agree with the belief that together 'We Can End All Violence Against Women'.

# CAMPAIGN NEWS

## India

The India campaign will target youth in higher educational institutions and rural communities. The youth in particular will be exhorted to become change makers to end violence against women, particularly domestic violence.

Plans are afoot for the national launch (25-26 November 2004) in New Delhi to be flagged off by a youth festival on 'Equal Relationships Are Violence Free'. Around 1,000 youth from nine states will participate in a variety of cultural activities. Similar campaigns will take place in Ajmer, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Varanasi, Bhopal, Dehra Dun, Ranchi, Bhubaneswar and Hyderabad. Activities will include youth runs for women's rights, cycle rallies, vigils, tableaux processions, theatre productions, television talk shows, poster contests and celebrity endorsements. The We Can alliance at present has the support of more than 250 organisations, networks and individuals.

## Pakistan

Pakistan is gearing up for the campaign launch in March 2005 by enlisting the support of many civil society groups against honour killing; initiating consultations with district-level organisations and human rights activists in Balochistan; and holding provincial-level meetings with stakeholders and partners in Quetta.

Two campaign-related studies '*Literature and Policy Review on Honour Killing in Pakistan*' and '*Assessment of Popular Campaigns*' will be released in November 2004 and poster competitions and exhibitions to build awareness will be organised. Public debate on the issue through opinion pieces in newspapers is planned.

## Nepal

The Nepal campaign, the focus of which is on trafficking of girls and women, will begin with a National Court of Women (with a roundtable discussion; public hearing and follow up meetings).

Preparations for the inaugural events from December 21-23 2004 are on. A working committee of seven members will steer the launch and partners have begun identifying survivors of trafficking who will testify in public. The production of video documentaries, audiocassettes and publishing material is underway. Radio *Sagarmatha* has started airing a weekly episode '*Saha Astitva*' on the issue.

## Contact Details

**Bangladesh** We Can Secretariat  
House 4, Road 3 Block I, Banani, Dhaka, Bangladesh Tel: 0088028813607-09, 0088028824440  
Fax: 0088028817402

**Sri Lanka** We Can Secretariat  
No 8, Kinross Avenue, Colombo 4, Sri Lanka Tel: +94112585965 Fax: +94112585270

**India** Regional Campaign Secretariat, C/o Regional Centre  
Oxfam (India) Trust, C 28-29, Outub Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110 016, India  
Tel: +91 (0)11 5239 6000 Fax: +91 (0)11 5239 6099, Email: secretariat@wecanendvaw.org

**Nepal** We Can Secretariat  
Shantabhawana, Senapa, Lalitpur 3, GPO Box #2500, Kathmandu Tel: 0097715536075 / 5527685  
Fax: 0097715523197

**Pakistan** We Can Secretariat  
House 201, Street 10, Sector E-7, Islamabad Tel: 0092512653341 - 42 Fax: 00920512653491

**Afghanistan** We Can Secretariat  
H 398, St 1, Qala-e-Fathullah, District 10, Kabul, Afghanistan Tel: 0092514443776 / 4301  
Fax: 0093762945672