

**FOUNDERS:**

Betty Williams, Ireland - 1976  
Máiread Maguire, Ireland - 1976  
Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Guatemala - 1992  
Prof. Jody Williams, USA - 1997  
Dr. Shirin Ebadi, Iran - 2003  
Prof. Wangari Maathai, Kenya - 2004

united for peace with justice and equality

**Statement from the Women Nobel Laureates  
Regional Launch of the United Nations Global Campaign  
“United in Putting an End to the Violence against Women”  
November 25, 2009**

As women Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, we join the call of the United Nations to put an end to violence against women as we celebrate the regional launch of its “United in Putting an End to the Violence against Women” campaign. This is a moment to recognize this global injustice, end the silence and honor the dignity of the many women who have survived and struggled for peace despite the pain.

Violence against women is a persistent systemic problem that not only hurts women. It undermines the prospects for development, democracy, and peace throughout the world. It affects the integrity, health, and life of the majority of the population of the world by seriously limiting women’s participation in and contribution to the economic, political, and cultural life of their communities.

In the context of wars, armed conflicts, political instability, and authoritarianism, violence against women is more acute. After many devastating episodes in human history, the international community has recognized that just how deeply women and societies are impacted and how patriarchal structures perpetuate the problems.

During conflict, violence against women is a deliberate strategy utilized to humiliate, terrorize, and destroy the social fabric of societies. Women are treated as booty and subjected to the most atrocious torture and forms of sexual exploitation. The recent conflicts in Sudan, Congo, Colombia, Burma and Honduras are proof of this shameful reality.

Unfortunately, Guatemala is no exception. During the 36 years of armed conflict, in addition to genocide and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people—most of whom were indigenous—sexual crimes against women during

the war left their lasting mark on communities.

As the women who came together at the “Women and War Tribunal of Memory” emphasized (November 2009 in Huehuetenango, Guatemala), rape was utilized as a strategy of war within the context of the counter-insurgency policies implemented by successive military governments in Guatemala and it was used to destroy the dignity of women and massacre huge numbers of Mayan women.

This violence did not end with the end of the war. Currently, Guatemala is at the top of the list in the Americas for violent deaths of women, and in second place for aggression against male and female human rights defenders. The lack of justice in the cases of sexual violence against Mayan women during the war has contributed to a culture of impunity and social tolerance of violence against women which persists to this day.

It is for this reason that we join in the regional launch of the UN’s “*United in Putting an End to the Violence against Women*” campaign. We applaud the many activities intended to honor the dignity of the Mayan women victims and survivors of sexual violence during the war. We feel confident that these activities will help to break the silence, overcome the fear, and open new paths towards formal judicial complaints, justice, and the reparation of harms. These important events also provide public recognition of the enormous courage and integrity with which Mayan women have resisted, moved forward, and defended their rights and those of their peoples. Theirs is the kind of quiet power that creates and sustains peace with justice.

The Guatemalan government and society owe an enormous debt to the women victims of the violence in Guatemala: to those women who were abused during the war, to those who currently suffer violence in their homes or on the streets as a result of the growing insecurity faced by citizens, and to those who are attacked for their courageous work in defense of human rights.

We call on the government of this country to redouble its efforts to fully comply with its international commitments to women’s rights, particularly those which were established by the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (“*Convention of Belém do Pará*”).

We also call upon the international community to resolutely support and

recognize the daily struggle of Guatemalan women to confront violence, in a way that strengthens the leadership of women who are seeking change integrated at every level.

In addition, today Nobel Women's Initiative will also begin spotlighting stories about women activists around the globe - from Wednesday, November 25th, to Thursday, December 10th. Each year since 1991, tens of thousands of activists from around the world have taken part in the **16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign**. The campaign's central messages - women's rights are human rights and violence against women constitutes a violation of human rights - have been a rallying call of the women's movement. This year, each day we will post on our website a video, photos, or story about a woman who is doing amazing things to make change in her world. Visit <http://nobelwomensinitiative.org/blogs/16days>

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