



Justice in Africa- On Whose Terms? 2010 Spring Conference; Washington, DC

Ask: Co-sponsor the International Violence Against Women Act

Our message

Despite the tremendous advances in the protection of women's rights, evidence shows that gender-based violence worldwide is still occurring on an unconscionable scale. According to the World Health Organization, one out of three women globally has experienced sexual coercion, physical assault, or other forms of abuse during her lifetime, while rates in some countries are as high as 70 percent.

Even further, in many African nations, violence against women is employed as a war tactic on an appalling scale, a strategy to "instill fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilians member of a community or an ethnic group," as stated in the groundbreaking UN Security Council Resolution 1820 condemning such practices and resolving to end impunity. This atrocious tendency has been particularly widespread in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where 200,000 cases of sexual abuse have been reported over the past decade, with countless more left undocumented. A 2008 UN survey indicates that over half of displaced woman have experienced sexual violence.

Violence against women is a global health crisis, a human rights violation, and a moral outrage, with an impact that is destabilizing for fragile democracies, detrimental to economic development, and devastating for individuals and communities. Yet in many countries, the lack of funding and insufficient political will has left eliminating violence against women far down on the list of national priorities. This unfortunate reality perpetuates a culture of silence or impunity for these crimes and prevents women from acquiring treatment for the serious physical and emotional wounds that comes from being a victim of such violence.

About the bill

The International Violence Against Women Act (H.R. 4594, S.2982) or I-VAWA for short, was introduced by Senators John Kerry, Barbara Boxer, Susan Collins, and Olympia Snowe; and by Representatives Bill Delahunt and Ted Poe earlier this year. This bill would empower the US government, through its foreign assistance and in collaboration with the international community, to pursue effective remedies to violence against women worldwide.

By forming the Office for Global Women's issues within the department of State, calling for ambitious and accountable country-specific programming, and requiring the integration of women's issues into all aspects of US foreign policy, the passage of this bill will demonstrate to the world that the US doing its part for women.

While fighting impunity for acts of sexual violence, I-VAWA would also direct the US, through its support of local organizations, to empower women in politics, economy, education, human rights promotion, and participation in peacebuilding.

Recommendations to the US congress:

- Co-sponsor the International Violence Against Women Act (H.R. 4594, S.2982) and take meaningful steps to ensure its passage. Encourage colleagues to do the same.
- Ensure sufficient funding is made available to USAID to effectively implement the strategy outlined as required by the bill.

Ask: Support Democracy in Africa Starting with Rwanda

Our Message

African nations holding elections this year include several with heavy handed and undemocratic regimes. Some have been through many years of armed conflict or are still recovering from such conflicts (Ethiopia, Sudan, Central African Republic, Burundi, Rwanda). Others have recently experienced a coup d'état (Guinea, Madagascar, and Niger). Next year's list includes Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Good governance is essential to Africa's stability and prosperity. Democracy is central in establishing strong institutions to enforce the rule of law, the pathway to achieving Africans' best aspirations. Although no single event can determine and establish democracy, elections are nevertheless an important step in that process. Yet the response to dictatorial regimes has typically been the use of more force. Such ways of transferring power have fueled long years of conflict across Africa. These conflicts have not only resulted in millions of lost lives and impoverishment of the affected people, but also are one of the major reasons for the increase of the already overwhelming number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa. African leaders agree that internal displacement is one of the most urgent challenges that Africa faces today, but they have yet to address the problem of undemocratic leadership that fuels most of the underlying social, political and economic struggles. Elections are an important opportunity for the international community to make clear its support of peaceful transitions of power, genuinely equal representation in politics, and a government that respects the human rights of, and is accountable to, its people.

Making the Case for Democracy in Rwanda

In August of this year, Rwanda is scheduled to hold its second presidential elections. However, each day there are new reports of human rights violations that include repression, arrest and imprisonment, assassinations, lack of freedom of speech and assembly and violence against opposition party members. *Human Rights Watch* reported that "[O]n several occasions, the government has used accusations of participation in the genocide, or 'genocide ideology,' as a way of targeting and discrediting its critics." The acts of political repression leading to Rwandan presidential elections in 2003 were no different from what we see today. In 2003, the world stood with President Paul Kagame and chose silence in the name of recovery and restoring order after the genocide. In 1994, Rwanda experienced a genocide on top of the 1959 and 1962 ethnic violence that led to many losses of life and waves of Rwanda refugees into Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, and the DRC, to name a few. Strong democracy in Rwanda with strong institutions and strong rule of law would mean taking an important step toward ending the Rwandan cycle of tribal politics that has resulted in ethnic violence. No genocide should happen again in Rwanda.

Recommendations to the US Congress and US government:

- Call for a hearing and request a report from Government Accountability Office (GAO) on the socio-political situation in Rwanda.
- Ensure that independent election observers are sent to Rwanda in addition to pressuring the Rwanda government to open the political space to the opposition and hold free, fair, and transparent elections in August of 2010.
- Call for an immediate registration of opposition parties seeking to do so and respect of human rights particularly the freedom of expression and assembly.
- Call for an immediate end to the use of violence and genocide guilt as a tactic to silence, intimidate, arrest, imprison innocent members of the opposition.