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Congressional Hearing on Gender-Based Violence

On Wednesday, November 20, 2013, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the United States Congress held a hearing on the Global Gender-Based Violence Threat. The hearing featured testimony from officials within the U.S. government who work on women's issues and gender-based violence (GBV), as well as from representatives of non-governmental organizations who work on GBV issues globally. Most of the testimony pointed out issues and facts that were clear and supported by evidence. Experts highlighted that, globally, one in three women experiences physical and/or sexual abuse in her lifetime, one in five women is the victim of a rape or attempted rape in her lifetime, 38% of murders of women are by intimate partners. In addition, they pointed out the need to address GBV in situations of crisis and conflict, the link between women's political participation and GBV, and the relationship between decision-making and power.

While the hearing focused on facts and factors that are crucial to understanding the realities and impacts of GBV on the international political landscape, the economy, and, most importantly, the victims, the hearing also seemed to ignore these same issues that are happening here in the United States.

*"The first time he hit me,
he said, 'I love you.'"*

TWC Client

Though representatives and testimony focused on the link between women's political participation and GBV, they did not address the disparities in women's political participation in the United States. The Inter-Parliamentary Union ranks the United States 79th in the world for women's political participation. Though women make up 50.8% of the U.S. population, they make up only 20% of the Senate and 17.9% of the House of Representatives (and both of those numbers represent the highest number of congresswomen ever).

Our gender-based violence statistics are similarly staggering. Of all of the women murdered in the U.S., one-third were murdered by an intimate partner. In addition, the National Research Council issued a report on Tuesday, November 19, 2013, finding that the Justice Department's National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) has been widely underreporting rape in the United States.¹ The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has another barometer – the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS).² For the same year, NISVS found 1.27 million completed and attempted rapes as compared to NCVS finding of 188,380.

While The Women's Collective agrees that the US Government needs to adopt a strong focus and clear lens on instances of gender-based violence happening globally, we also firmly assert that we must also prioritize funding, interventions, and policies that remedy the gross effects of the gender-based violence on women here at home in the United States. We must all acknowledge that women in the U.S. are experiencing similar violence as those in developing countries, often fueled by many of the same social drivers -- from poverty to homelessness. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) pointed out that, "When women succeed, the world succeeds." She is absolutely right, and that sentiment needs to drive policy in the U.S. as well as abroad.

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¹ National Research Council. *Estimating the Incidence of Rape and Sexual Assault*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2013.

² Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walters, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., & Stevens, M.R. (2011). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.