



November/December 2003

# NEWSLETTER

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## LENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### *FROM DOMESTIC TO GLOBAL*

*Written by Hannah Hadikein, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace*

December 6<sup>th</sup> is a day etched in the memory of many people in Canada. On that day in 1989, a lone man walked into the halls of L'Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal, selected young women students, and gunned them down. By the time the massacre ended, fourteen women were dead and many lay wounded.

The Government of Canada has officially declared December 6 a "Day of Remembrance and Action to Stop Violence Against Women." Violence against women is a human rights issue across the globe. Violence takes many forms including domestic, political and cultural. Amnesty International regularly posts a Human Rights Bulletin profiling human rights abuses. Many of these describe women's detention, torture, intimidation and discrimination under various regimes. Still others document the experiences of women in refugee camps for whom even an act of collecting firewood presents a hazard of possible abduction, rape or murder.

In fact, female refugees are often victims many times over. For instance "forgotten were the fates of several thousand girls aged between 8-10 whose families fled their southern Sudanese village because of vicious fighting between rebels and government troops..." (UNHCR, *The Lost Girls of Sudan*, 2002). Women and children are the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, wars, and civil and political strife. Women are subject to widespread sexual abuse in war torn countries. In Rwanda and Bosnia for example, rape became a deliberate aim of war. The figures are staggering. In Bosnia during one year (1992) over 20,000 Muslim women were raped! (UN, Geneva, figures) A recent (November 6-12) *Guardian Weekly* describes the atrocities committed against women during the eastern Congo's five years of war: "Gang rape has been so violent, so systematic, so common, ... that thousands of women are suffering from vaginal fistula, leaving them... with the threat of debilitating lifelong health problems." It is estimated that one in every three women is a victim. This form of cultural homicide robs the lives of girls and women permanently, as they become victims twice over, experiencing not only the horror of sexual assault but also being ostracized and abandoned by their families and communities.

Young female victims are often forced into prostitution, slavery and the international sex trade. These homeless young people are abducted to serve as child soldiers "more than 300,000 youngsters, many of them female refugees, are currently serving as child soldiers around the world... with the girls often forced into different forms of sexual slavery" (UNHCR, *The World of Refugee Women at a Glance*, 2002). The percentage of women infected with HIV/AIDS in the last few years has risen to monumental proportions with girls in countries like Sub-Saharan Africa to be five times more likely to be infected than boys. Worldwide an estimated 1.3 billion people live in abject poverty on less than \$1 per day, 70% of them women). A recent *Save the Children* report documented the need to protect women and children caught in the crossfire of wars around the world. "The current situation of change of power

*Cont'd on next page*

and instability in Afghanistan may lead to increased violence against women in an atmosphere of impunity.” (U.N. Secretary –General Kofi Anann).

Violence against women violates and nullifies the enjoyment of their fundamental freedoms, their ability to achieve equality, peace and development. Only in breaking the silence of violence can a new consciousness gain prominence and hold hope for the power of nonviolence. “Feminist activism is a vision for a safer, non-violent, non-militarist world based on respect for diversity and egalitarian sharing of resources.” (The Hindu, 2003)

Mathew Arnold, a British poet from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century is quoted as saying “ If ever the world sees a time when women shall come together purely and simply for the benefit of mankind, it will be a power such as the world has never known”.

The world desperately needs the women who can bring about the change. Grandmothers are needed for their wisdom, compassion and hearts. Women baring witness are needed for their inspiration and their healing. Women peacemakers are needed for their activism, conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts. Women are needed to perform acts of civil disobedience. Women are needed like those marching on Mother’s Day in Zimbabwe carrying brooms in “symbolic sweeping away the violence and torture of people, and to get our house in order”. Women are needed at international conferences to ensure equal participation of women in public and economic life. Women are needed in the UN to address and implement the next steps in reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan and to ensure full participation of women in the governance structures. Women are needed to hold governments accountable in the adoption and implementation of UN Resolution 1325, the mandate of which promotes the equal participation of women and a gender perspective in peace and security, policymaking, and peace negotiating and peacekeeping. Women are needed to address all summits discussing peace and humanitarian issues. Women are needed to carry forth their prayers and spiritual practices. Women are needed to create a new paradigm in domestic and foreign policy. Women are needed to build relationships and bridge ethnic and cultural divides.

With women advancing the power of nonviolence, there remains much for everyone else to do to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century society that does not stand for perpetrators of violence and human rights violations in private or public domains:

- Support steps to reduce the global arms trade and the development of stockpiles of weapons by all countries.
- Enforce and extend international agreements including the removal of all nuclear missiles.
- Promote development assistance that helps eradicate the conditions in which poverty, famine and conflict flourish.
- Advocate for funding for effective intervention that breaks the cycle of violence.
- Support the efforts of local peace groups and international nonviolent movements such as the International Solidarity Movement active in the Middle East.
- Join or form a chapter of Amnesty International.
- Act Now. Take Action.

This is a struggle against violence, but also a struggle for an alternative vision of the world. We must imagine it to create it. If not us, then who? If not now, then when?

***“Warfare must be replaced by dialogue leading to mutual understanding as a basis of multilateral cooperation in regard to relations among nations in the political as well as in the economic and the ecological spheres”***

*(The Club of Budapest)*

## ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR'S REPORT *By Cheryl Dowden*

It's hard to believe that we are looking at only 4 months until our MCAWS funding runs out! What I do know is that women's centres have struggled with the issue of funding from the outset. It is discouraging to note that the government has given and then it has taken away. Women in this province worked extremely hard to influence policy regarding government funding and now we are at a point where we no longer have a Stand Alone Ministry of Women's Equality, or a Minister of Women's Equality that supports women's centres, and we no longer have a government that recognizes that we offer an important and essential service to women in our communities. In September, we cut our Drop-In Hours to two days a week and in October, we saw more women coming in then during any one month in the last reporting period. We have seen a real rise in women coming in to get their basic needs met for food and clothing. We are deeply concerned about what will happen on April 1<sup>st</sup> when many will be cut off from social assistance and when we may no longer be able to offer our services. It is important that we send a strong message to our provincial and municipal governments that the impact of cuts to women's services will create a huge gap for women in terms of support around housing, employment, childcare and parenting, violence issues, health, etc. Let's make our voices heard. WALK OUT at 10:30am on December 8<sup>th</sup> and tell Blair what you think!!!!

Yes, there are big challenges being faced here at Nelson Women's Centre these days, but I want to recognize the high level of energy and support from women in the community in regards to our fundraising efforts. Cheques are coming in for the House Campaign and I would like to extend a BIG THANK YOU to all of you who have rallied to support the Women's Centre. We have raised approximately \$7,000 and with \$10,000 from an estate gift that we have set aside, we are feeling very positive about our campaign. We will also be raffling off a Shed that has been donated by the Women In Trades and Technology Program and you will probably be approached by someone selling tickets in the near future. Again, thanks for your support and we are doing the best we can given the circumstances to keep our Women's Centre open!!!!



### WOMENS'S RECREATIONAL AVALANCHE AWARENESS COURSE

This is the 2nd year that the Recreational Avalanche Awareness Course will be offered at the Women's Centre. We are very fortunate to have access to hundreds of square kilometres of backcountry recreation. If you access the backcountry, it is essential that you take an Avalanche Awareness course and that you are aware and capable of assessing the risks. This course, offered by two experienced and certified woman instructors, takes place at the Women's Centre Friday, Saturday and Sunday, **Dec 12 - 14**. For more information, please call Cheryl at 352-3177.

### West Kootenay Women's Association News

Published by Nelson & District Women's Centre  
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*Many thanks to Matthew Jacobson on all his work on the auction poster and invitation and to Chloe Sage, Tanya Wright, and anyone else working their butts off on the auction. And to the Fundraising Committee for all their commitment to the Association.*

We need your help, contributions, event listings, art, and "Letters to the Editor"! WKWA News is published 7 times a year. Call us for submission deadlines.

*Operational funding provided by the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services, Province of British Columbia. Funding for Volunteer Coordination provided by BC Gaming Commission. Funding for the Women's Economic Equality Project provided by Status of Women Canada.*



A CRUCIAL  
TIME WE CAN'T AFFORD TO BE  
PASSIVE SPECTATORS-IF WE SIT  
BACK AND LET THEM GET AWAY  
WITH THIS... ONE DAY WE WILL  
WAKE UP TO FIND OUR FREEDOM



HAS PASSED  
AWAY LIKE  
A DREAM!

Women,  
remember  
your power.  
Remember your  
responsibility.  
We must all use our  
power to do good.  
We must hold back  
the moccasins."

www.peace.ca/  
mohawkwomen

# WOMYN'S WALKOUT DEC. 8 2003

BC-WIDE

Brought to you by:  
Your Grandmother, Your Mother,  
Your Auntie,  
Your Daughter,  
Your Neice,  
Your wife,  
Your girlfriend

## Womyn's strikes have been around for eons.

The BC government is waging a war against womyn and vulnerable people in BC. What can we do to stop them? Stop work! Paid or unpaid, our work is essential. On Dec. 8 walk out at 10:30 am. If you can't stop work, make your own "I support the Womyn's Walkout" button and wear it. Remind people that they need your cheap or free labour and that if all womyn's work stopped, humanity would end (no more babies!). Why Dec. 8? To be close to Dec. 6, Day of Remembrance and Action to Stop Violence Against Women in honour of the women who died in the 1989 Montreal massacre. But we don't need to look to Montreal to see womyn's lives destroyed. We just need to look at what the government is doing here in BC.

**Campbell's Casualty list:**  
Cutting welfare, pay equity, daycare,  
housing, jails, legal aid, human rights,  
victim services, women's services,  
doctors assistance, poverty law,  
employment standards, services in the  
Highlands, ripping up union contracts,  
holding a racist \$9 Million referendum,  
aboriginal treaty rights and squandering  
the olympics.

Why the Womyn's Walkout action? Because it would hit the government in the pocket book. This is the only language they understand. Men you too take action Do your own Walk out for Womyn!

## CALLING ALL WOMEN

Gather at the offices of our MLA, Blair Suffredine  
**540 Baker Street, Nelson**  
**10:30 AM Monday, December 8, 2003**