



COALITION TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS GLOBALLY

INTERNATIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT HISTORY

The **International Violence Against Women Act** and the coalition that has come together to support it began forming in 2003. At that time, two different coalitions were working in the United States developing policy and possibly legislation to address gender-based violence (GBV) internationally. Futures Without Violence, then Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF), and the International Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is co-chaired the international working group of the coalition that was developing the U.S. Violence Against Women Act of 2004. Women Thrive Worldwide (then the Women's EDGE Coalition) and Amnesty International USA also were working together to develop a robust policy response to promote gender equality within foreign assistance and U.S. diplomacy and had also been working to address violence against women as they developed the GAINS for Women and Girls bill.

Importantly, key research was also being conducted around the health and economic impacts of violence against women and girls, and advocacy around HIV/AIDS and GBV and women in conflict was also being spearheaded by groups like the International Center for Research on Women, World Health Organization, Women's Refugee Commission/International Rescue Committee and the Center for Health and Gender Equity.

In June 2003, the FVPF hosted a meeting at the Open Society Institute in Washington, D.C. that brought together many of the individuals and organizations working on these issues to try and develop a unified agenda around International GBV. Coming out of that meeting, organizations chose to focus initially on funding for the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women. At that point, the United States was not contributing to the Trust Fund and it seemed like the best vehicle to accomplish the goals identified by the groups. A small working group continued to meet and the co-chairs of the two already existing working groups agreed to join and form a single coalition.

Within two years, the coalition had secured funding for the UNIFEM Trust Fund, thanks to the leadership of Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D-NY), who also encouraged NGOs working on these issues to suggest something more substantive, specifically around sexual violence. The NGOs working on this then began an exhaustive research process to develop such legislation, including translating outlines of the legislation into Spanish, French and Russian, and distributing to local women's groups and networks throughout the developing world. More than 100 individuals and organizations offered feedback on the proposed legislation. At that same time Senator Joe Biden, author of the Violence Against Women Act, was working on the reauthorization of his landmark bill and also co-chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with Senator Richard Lugar. During 2005-2006, groups working on these issues approached them about introducing a companion bill to VAWA that focused more on the needs of women and girls in the developing world. They eagerly took on that work and in 2007 the International Violence Against Women Act was first introduced, S. 2279. A companion version of the bill was later introduced in the House of Representatives and championed by Chairman Howard Berman, after its previous champion, Congressman Tom Lantos passed away.

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The bill was set to be marked up in the Senate in September 2008, however shortly before that hearing Senator Biden was tapped to be the Vice Presidential running mate of Barack Obama, and understandably the hearing and the legislation were put on hold.

During the 111th Congress, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Senator John Kerry (D-MA) reintroduced the bill with Senators Olympia Snowe (R-ME) and Susan Collins (R-ME) in the Senate, and Congressmen Bill Delahunt (D-MA) and Ted Poe (R-TX) championed it in the House. Hearings were held in both the House and Senate that included testimony from UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador Nicole Kidman, former Ambassador Don Steinberg and Ambassador Melanne Vermeer, and the bill was passed out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in December 2010. Unfortunately, Congress adjourned before further action could be taken.

In the 112th Congress the I-VAWA Coalition worked with Congressmen Ted Poe (R-TX) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) to reintroduce the bill in the House. Due to the challenges of the new Republican leadership in the Congress most efforts during 2011 the Coalition shifted gears and decided to work on actions the Obama Administration could take directly to implement core elements of the I-VAWA as well as minimal funding requests to begin development of the comprehensive strategy called for in the I-VAWA. In addition, the coalition continued to work to include components of the bill in other appropriate vehicles such as the National Defense Authorization Act.

The Coalition's work with appropriators led to inclusion of Report Language in the FY12 Omnibus that directed State and USAID to write a multi-sectoral strategy on gender-based violence - that was the core of what I-VAWA sought to achieve. The strategy laid out an inter-agency approach to identify, coordinate, integrate and leverage U.S. efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, as well as men and boys, around the world. The Coalition then worked with staff across federal agencies to contribute to the final document. In August 2012, the Obama Administration released the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence* through Executive Order.

At the start of the 113th Congress, the Coalition and congressional champions sought to re-introduce I-VAWA once more with the hopes of codifying the Strategy that the Administration released. The Coalition was intentional about ensuring that the bill remained as bipartisan as possible and congressional champions waited to secure broad support before taking action. The Coalition used the legislation to continue to educate Members and the general public around the issue to demonstrate to this and future administrations that GBV prevention and response is central to development and foreign policy. Under the leadership of Representative Gibson (R-NY) an amendment was adopted in the Joint Explanatory statement to accompany the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015:

“We encourage the DOD to support the continued implementation of the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally and to participate in the interagency working group. Gender-based violence impacts security and stability worldwide and as such, the United States must continue to lead the global effort to actively address it. We direct the Secretary of Defense or his designee(s) to brief the appropriate congressional committees on efforts by the DOD relating to its participation in the working group not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act.”

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