

INTERNATIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT (I-VAWA) 2013 SUMMARY

Background:

One out of every three women worldwide will be physically, sexually or otherwise abused during her lifetime—with rates reaching 70 percent in some countries. This type of violence ranges from rape to domestic violence and acid burnings to dowry deaths and so-called “honor killings.” Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation, a public health epidemic and a barrier to solving global challenges such as extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS and conflict. It devastates the lives of millions of women and girls—in peacetime and in conflict—and knows no national or cultural barriers. Most importantly, it must end.

In August of 2012, the U.S. government released its first ever *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence (Strategy)*. The Strategy is largely derived from and has long been a core component of the International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA), H.R. 3571, and its release is a historic and unprecedented effort by the United States to address violence against women and girls globally.

In 2013, the I-VAWA will direct the U.S. government to implement its Strategy to reduce violence against women and girls in at least 5 countries where it is severe. Enhanced data collection and transparency of results is a core component of the bill that ensures accountability and continued use of best practices. The I-VAWA recognizes that violence intersects with nearly every facet of women’s lives and therefore supports health programs and survivor services, encourages legal accountability and a change of public attitudes, promotes access to economic opportunity projects and education, and addresses violence against women and girls in humanitarian situations. The I-VAWA also emphasizes support and capacity-building for local women’s organizations already working to stop violence against women and girls.

The I-VAWA makes ending violence against women and girls a top diplomatic priority. It permanently authorizes the Office of Global Women’s Issues in the State Department as well as the position of the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, who is responsible for coordinating activities, policies, programs, and funding relating to gender integration and women’s empowerment internationally, including those intended to prevent and respond to violence against women.

More specifically, the I-VAWA would do the following:

Increase Legal and Judicial Protection to Address Violence Against Women and Girls.

The I-VAWA focuses on establishing and supporting laws and legal structures that help prevent and appropriately respond to all forms of violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, rape, physical abuse, ‘honor killings,’ and child or forced marriage. Emphasis is placed on promoting political, legal, and institutional reforms that recognize violence against women and girls as a crime and train police and the judiciary to hold violators accountable and to respond to the needs of victims. This includes helping women and girls access the justice sector and ensuring that they are safe and supported throughout the legal process.

Increase Health Sector Capacity to Address Violence Against Women and Girls.

The I-VAWA will integrate programs to address violence against women and girls into already existing health programs focused on child survival, women's health, and HIV/AIDS prevention, care, and treatment. It takes a holistic "systems" approach and emphasizes enhancing the capacity of the health sector to assess the impact of violence on a woman and girl's health and help her protect herself from violence.

Change Social Norms to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

The I-VAWA focuses on preventing violence by changing community norms and attitudes about the acceptability of violence against women and girls. It will support public awareness programs to change attitudes that condone and at times encourage violence against women and girls, and will emphasize community-based solutions. For instance, activities supported by the I-VAWA could include programs that organize women and girls who are survivors of violence to speak out publicly or work with male leaders to help other men and boys become more supportive of respectful and non-violent relationships.

Increase Women's Economic Opportunity and Education.

The I-VAWA focuses on reducing women and girls' vulnerability to violence by improving their economic status and educational opportunities. Emphasis is placed on ensuring women's access to job training and employment opportunities and increasing their right to own land and property. This would allow them to potentially support themselves and their children. The legislation also addresses the rights of women and girls to work and go to school free of sexual coercion and assault.

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