

Dear Editor,

25 November 2015 – International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women – will mark Help & Shelter's 20th anniversary.

Our mission when we began providing services to the victims of violence is as relevant now as it was then: to contribute to bringing about a society where attitudes to the use of violence and practices of violence have been transformed.

Over the past 2 decades, we have provided counselling services to thousands of victims of violence (including 367 women and 78 men between 1 January and 31 October 2015), the vast majority of them women and girl victims of domestic and sexual violence and child abuse, have provided a place of safety for hundreds of female victims of violence and their children, and have reached tens of thousands of people through our public education work.

But violence against women remains 'a pandemic of global proportions. Unlike an illness, however, perpetrators and even entire societies choose to commit violence—and can choose to stop. Violence is not inevitable. It can be prevented' (<http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/end-violence-against-women>). Hence prevention is the theme of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and of the UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign's 16 days call for action.

As UN Women say, 'prevention strategies should be holistic, with multiple interventions undertaken in parallel in order to have long-lasting and permanent effects. Many sectors, actors and stakeholders need to be engaged. More evidence is emerging on what interventions work to prevent violence—from community mobilization to change social norms, to comprehensive school interventions targeting staff and pupils, to economic empowerment and income supplements coupled with gender equality training' (Ibid.).

If prevention strategies are to be effective, they must be adequately and sustainably resourced. Throughout our existence, the right words have largely been spoken by those in power but the resources to convert words

into action have been sadly lacking. For example, implementation of the 1998 National Policy on Domestic Violence was sketchy at best and the multi-sectoral Domestic Violence Oversight Committee (the body tasked with overseeing and monitoring implementation of the policy) has not been convened for years. And the Task Force for the Prevention of Sexual Violence which is supposed to promote implementation of the Sexual Offences Act, has not met more than a handful of times. We call on the government to urgently convene the committee and the task force to continue their work for the elimination and reduction of escalating domestic and sexual violence in Guyana.

How many more women will be killed, maimed and traumatised and have to leave their homes and take their children to a place of safety through no fault of their own, and by how many more millions of dollars does the cost to individuals, families, businesses, communities and the country have to escalate before effective and prevention strategies are implemented and sustained?

How long before one third of our women do not have their fundamental human rights violated?

Every day that passes without concerted action being taken is one day too long.

We at Help & Shelter hope to be able to continue to work towards the realisation of our mission and take this opportunity to again thank all those who have assisted us in any way over the past 20 years.

We desperately need continuing support as we begin our third decade of work against violence against women.

Yours faithfully,

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For Help & Shelter
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