

**HELP & SHELTER STATEMENT TO MARK INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE
ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN – 25 NOVEMBER 2012**

Seventeen years ago today, Help & Shelter formally launched its crisis service to provide counselling, referral services and other support to victims of domestic and sexual violence and child abuse.

The date, 25 November, was chosen as it is International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (IDEVAW), and women and girls comprise the overwhelming majority of victims of the violence we dedicated ourselves to working against.

Since 25 November 1995, we have counselled over 12,000 women and girls, empowering them to develop the necessary coping skills, confidence and self esteem so that they can rebuild their lives free from violence and the threat of violence. We have also raised awareness about the issue of gender-based violence with a view to bringing about changes in attitudes and behaviours, reaching over 38,000 people directly and many more indirectly through our leaflets, posters and radio and television public service announcements. In addition, our shelter has provided a place of safety for over 900 abused women and their children.

We believe that through our work we have saved and improved the lives of women and girls throughout Guyana, but on a daily basis we are confronted with the tragedy of having been unable to prevent the death of and injury to so many more.

Since this day last year, 31 women have been the victims of gender-based murder - doused with gasoline and set alight, stabbed, strangled, and hacked and beaten to death. Thousands more have been raped, shot, stabbed, chopped and subjected to other forms of violence in flagrant breach of their human rights.

At our candlelight vigil at the Seawall Bandstand from 5pm to 7pm this evening, to which all are invited, we will remember and honour all victims of violence against women as we rededicate ourselves to continuing our efforts to bring an end to this travesty and to help survivors, despite the ever-present challenge of severely limited resources.

We are heartened that more and more individuals and organisations are now speaking out against violence against women. Advocacy is essential to bringing about changes in attitudes and behaviour, but without the resources to sustain that advocacy and to provide counselling, shelter and other support services to survivors, we will inevitably year after year continue to be faced with the unacceptable personal, social and economic costs of violence against women to individuals, families, communities and the country.

Help & Shelter recently won a competitive UN Women grant for innovative activities to mark IDEVAW and the Sixteen Days of Activism against Violence against Women (25 November to 10 December) and is in the process of producing a documentary to raise awareness of the impact of domestic violence in Guyana, which will be used as a tool to promote respect for the rights of women and girls to live free of violence and the threat of violence.

Finally, we welcome the announcement that entertainer Chris Brown will now not be coming to Guyana. We already have far too many abusers among us.