

Dear Editor,

This year, International Day against the Elimination of Violence Against Women and 16 days of activism are being observed under the theme “Orange the world: #HearMeToo”, which acknowledges women and girl survivors of violence and those speaking out and taking action.

To this end, Help & Shelter acknowledges the women and girls who have survived acts of gender-based violence and are empowered to live lives free of violence, and salutes those individuals, groups and organizations who are taking a stand against violence and the threat of violence in all its forms by breaking the silence and speaking out both in Guyana and around the world, as we work towards the elimination of this scourge from our respective societies.

But let us not forget the vast number of women and girls who continue to suffer in silence, and the threat of violence that still overwhelmingly pervades our society.

So far in 2018 23 women have been murdered, the majority of them victims of intimate partner violence. The rape, sexual assault and other abuses of our children at the hands of family members and persons in positions of trust continues, as does the physical and sexual harassment of our women and girls not only in their homes but in schools, workplaces, public offices, religious and other institutions.

Although there has been an increase in the reporting of violence and abuse as evidenced by government agencies, law enforcement and NGO reports, it is not enough to simply encourage persons to report - we need to ensure that systems are in place and fully functional to appropriately respond to those affected, ensuring they receive justice and are protected from all attempts to suppress their voices and re-victimize them for their courage in speaking out.

Help & Shelter recommends intensive educational programmes for schools and communities to reverse the desensitization to violence and abuse, and the full implementation of laws that address the issue of violence against women and girls, and stands as ever willing to support all such initiatives.

We wish to acknowledge the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women for the current support of our public education work in schools, the Government of Guyana for the support afforded for our work in providing counseling and a shelter for affected women and children, and all our networking partners and donors for their continued support.

Credit is due to the magistracy for their referrals, which serve to foster engagement with male perpetrators. To those who access our hotline and Facebook page to report abuse on other’s behalf, we say thank you for your concern and continued vigilance.

Finally, we urge everyone to support initiatives geared towards the elimination of every form of violence: the issue affects us all. We cannot remain silent, we must be proactive. Violence is never a personal matter.

A life free of violence is everyone’s right.

**The Board of Directors, Staff and Volunteers of Help & Shelter**