

## **HELP & SHELTER'S STATEMENT TO MARK**

### **INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**25 NOVEMBER 2013**

As we join the world in observance of International Day for the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women (IDEVAW), we also celebrate another year of dedicated and committed service to the populace of Guyana through our range of services from counselling/support for victims/survivors, to counselling of perpetrators, public education programmes and shelter for women and children affected by domestic violence and other human rights violations.

Help & Shelter has over the past 18 years played a significant role in raising awareness of VAW countrywide through our public education programmes, which include workshops and awareness sessions, dissemination of public educational materials, public service announcements and technical support to other public and private sector organisations. Between November 1995 and October 2013, 15,300 victims/survivors of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence received face-to-face, hotline and court support counselling, and over 40,000 people were reached through public education programmes. And since November 2000, over 840 abused women and their children have been provided with a place of safety at our shelter.

In 2013, we are once again reminded of the urgent need for better response mechanisms and the development and promotion of improved violence prevention measures. The gruesome murders of 15 women by their male partners, compounded by the fact that children have also lost their lives in these tragedies, should be of significant concern to all Guyanese. Greater emphasis is needed on examining the contributing factors and taking steps mitigate such threats.

The murder of a 15 year old girl by her 17 year old lover epitomises the failures of our society to pave a positive road for the next generation. A 15 year old being granted permission to marry her 38 year old rapist highlights the inconsistencies in our judicial system and the lack of or non-implementation of relevant laws to protect our nation's women and girls. Such acts should be strongly condemned, hence our call for the relevant authorities to step up and take their mandate seriously to ensure that our citizens are protected from the threats of sexual and domestic violence.

In addition, we recognise the need for county wide education programs that focus on anger management and conflict resolution skills, trained personnel to address an increasing mental health problem and a targeted approach to reducing the alcohol consumption and illicit drug use particularly prevalent among our nation's youth.

Help & Shelter acknowledges and compliments the efforts of the many organisations, media entities, radio and television personalities and individuals who have been doing their part in raising awareness of the destructiveness of domestic violence. But our talk must be translated into meaningful and noticeable actions; we must thoroughly examine our cultural practices and beliefs, socialisation methods, societal norms and expectations that endorse violent behaviors and be determined to make the necessary changes that will contribute to a transformation in our attitudes towards the use of violence and the elimination of this scourge from our society.

The reduction/elimination of VAW in particular and violence in general is not easily achieved; it requires substantial financial support, greater collaborations and cooperation among governmental, non-governmental and international organizations. We therefore call for the immediate convening of the

National Domestic Violence Oversight Committee and Sexual Offences Task Force, two multi-sectoral bodies that are mandated to develop and monitor national plans of action for the prevention of domestic violence and sexual offences in Guyana. In addition, specialised units within the Guyana Police Force are needed to address the complexity and severity of domestic and sexual violence offences, which show no indication of being reduced.

Finally, while we recognise the need for greater resources and interventions, we are reminded that we have ultimate responsibility for our own safety and protection and for protecting the vulnerable amongst us. Let us be each other's keeper.