

# Foreword

Violence against women is a significant obstacle to development in Latin American and Caribbean countries. As a prevalent human rights abuse and public health problem, it affects the health, economic opportunities, rights, and welfare of 30–50 percent of the region's women. Its repercussions extend far beyond these victims, as it threatens the stability, security, and social welfare of families and their status in the community. From both an ethical and legal standpoint, violence undermines the human rights of a woman and her family and affects the exercise of her civil rights.

Eradicating violence against women is an essential part of our region's development. Current development models emphasize the interdependence of economic, political, institutional, social, and cultural dimensions and the contribution that each one makes to the others and to the whole. The persistent victimization of large numbers of women, by way of physical and sexual violence, impedes their active participation in this development process and deters the cultural and institutional changes necessary for democratic and economic development.

This link has been globally recognized largely due to feminist and human rights movements. What was once viewed as a personal problem is now considered in a much broader perspective based on women's human rights and empowerment. These changes, especially in the past two decades, have led to the adoption of national and international laws and policies to help prevent, address, penalize, and eradicate violence against women. Various guidelines and initiatives to confront this scourge were recommended at the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1994), and the International Conference on Population and Development (El Cairo, 1994).

The legal framework established first by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and subsequently, with more specific criteria, by the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará, 1994) requires member states to implement and monitor laws and policies to prevent, address, and punish violence against women. Most Latin American and Caribbean countries have signed both conventions and have family/domestic violence laws on the books, some of which focus on the mistreatment of women.

However, existing laws and policies within Latin American and Caribbean countries do not center on women's rights and empowerment, as prescribed by the conventions and as outlined in this publication. In many countries, legal instruments and penal codes remain deficient; for example, they still do not recognize or standardize serious crimes such as marital rape, sexual violence in the home, and sexual harassment in the workplace. Only a few countries offer general psychological, medical, and legal services. Furthermore, affected women continue to lack access to legal counsel and mechanisms to protect them once they file a complaint with the police or a judge. Although mediation and conciliation in abusive situations are not recommended as legislative and doctrinal positions in comparative law, they are the most commonly used means in the administration of justice. Moreover, very few governments designate the resources necessary to develop protocols, train service providers, or alert women and citizens of these laws and policies so that they can effectively implement them.

This advocacy packet on violence against women provides a guide, centered on women's human rights, for improving legislation and policies and recommending steps for their implementation. The guide is the result of a collaboration led by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) with its partner United Nations agencies and with regional nongovernmental organizations including: the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM/OAS), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Latin American Committee for Women's Rights (CLADEM), Ipas, Isis International, the Inter-American Parliamentary Group, and the Center for Reproductive Health. The information presented here is based on the results of expert meetings and the subsequent publication "Model for Laws and Other Policies on Intra-Family Violence against Women," which was developed between 2003 and 2006 and validated in Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic. It was also widely disseminated and presented in various national and international fora with the participation of parliamentary and judicial sectors, in some cases leading to legislative changes, new research, local policies, and proposals to monitor policies on the issue.

Using the information gained through these processes, PAHO has produced this advocacy package on public policies and violence against women. It is intended to be used by a wide audience, including parliamentarians, policymakers, advocacy groups, governmental and nongovernmental agencies, women's networks, and other interested parties. It consists of five fact sheets that can be used as a set or individually to assist in the development of effective laws and policies that can contribute to the prevention of violence against women. The fact sheets cover the following themes: Public Policy on Domestic Violence, Key Components of Laws and Policies on Domestic Violence, Municipal Policies on Violence against Women, Comprehensive Care for Domestic Violence against Women in the Health Sector, and Monitoring of Laws and Policies on Domestic Violence.

We hope that you find this packet useful for improving and implementing policies and laws that ensure a life free of violence as an inalienable right of all women, men, and children in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Gender, Ethnicity and Health Unit



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