

**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing:
Ending Violence Against Women in Politics
March 21, 2017**

Remarks by Rep. Jan Schakowsky

Democracy depends on people's ability to participate in the political process, but women around the world have been prevented from fully participating – often through violence.

Violence against women in politics targets women for their participation in political or public life. Perpetrators use violence to prevent women from holding leadership positions or freely exercising their political rights. A few of these acts of gender-based violence make headlines. But most are quiet, personal, humiliating and harmful acts that erode women's participation in public life around the world.

Women who fight to have their voices heard face the threat of physical violence in addition to gender-based harassment and intimidation. This not just a problem restricted to elected officials. It extends to women in every political role from voter to candidate, from activist to government employee. Women voters are attacked at up to four times the rate of men in some countries. Women in at least ten countries have been beaten or killed for voting against the wishes of their husbands, fathers, or clan leaders.

In Pakistan's 2008 election, parties colluded to keep women from voting or running for office. And armed men drove around announcing over loudspeaker that women would be shot if they tried to vote. Politically active women in Zimbabwe were punished with genital mutilation. Women labor leaders and civic leaders are also targeted for their leadership in public affairs. And this problem is not limited to developing countries. In the United Kingdom, for instance, female MPs reported receiving thousands of death and rape threats online.

We must confront the use of violence to prevent women from exercising their rights and participating fully in democracy. When women do not vote and do not run for office, their voices are not heard in government. When violence, intimidation, and harassment deter young women from volunteering for campaigns or pursuing careers in government, we lose the opportunity to develop those women into future leaders.

I want to thank the Human Rights Commission for bringing attention to this important topic. We have an outstanding panel of women today – all of whom have worked in government and championed women's political participation. Thank you all for being here, and I look forward to our discussion.