

THE GLOBAL GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THREAT

HEARING

BEFORE THE

TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

NOVEMBER 20, 2013

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THE GLOBAL GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THREAT

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2013

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,

Washington, D.C.

The commission met, pursuant to call, at 2:30 p.m., in Room 2175 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. James P. McGovern [co-chairman of the commission] presiding.

Mr. McGOVERN. Welcome everybody. I apologize for being late, but we had a series of votes that messed everything up a little bit. But we are not too late. But before I begin, I want to yield to my colleague from Rhode Island, Mr. Cicilline, for a unanimous consent request.

Mr. CICILLINI. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for yielding, and I request unanimous consent that would permit members of the commission to submit written testimony within the next five days.

Mr. McGOVERN. Without objection.

Mr. CICILLINI. Thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for being here for this important hearing on global gender-based violence. I want to thank J.P. Shuster and the staff of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for organizing today's hearing. I also want to thank the International Rescue Committee for working with the commission to organize this morning's excellent photo exhibit in the Rayburn foyer. Some of these photos are set up around us in today's hearing room. These images are not only a powerful call to action, but they remind us of the extraordinary resilience of women and girls and their capacity to be powerful agents of change and peace in our societies. Finally, I want to thank our witnesses, especially those who traveled from Haiti and India, for being with us today.

Monday, November 25th, is the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Over the past two decades, the international community has increasingly recognized gender-based violence, often called GBV, as a significant human rights and global health issue. GBV has many forms. It includes both random acts of violence as well as sustained abuse over time. It can include forced sex, physical violence and psychological abuse. Some abuses are embedded in culture or tradition such as the so-called honor killings, or female genital mutilation.

The trafficking of women and girls for labor and sex is an especially pervasive form of GBV worldwide. And it is important to note that GBV affects not only women but also sexual attacks against men and boys. The United States is hardly exempt from gender-based violence and violence against women. According to the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women, nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men have been raped in their lifetime. One in four women and one in seven men have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner.

Hundreds of thousands of American children each year are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation. Decades of investment in passing laws supporting victims of violence, training advocates, lawyers, police, judges, teachers, doctors, nurses and the public are finally beginning to change how victims of physical, psychological and sexual violence are viewed by their communities and by medical law enforcement and legal professionals, and we still have a long way to go.

In recent years, the U.S. and international community have increasingly confronted the problem of GBV in emergency situations such as violent conflict, war and natural disasters. In such cases vulnerable populations face an array of threats including GBV, and often their governments, communities and families fail to protect them. Refugees and the internally displaced, and those attempting to return home can remain vulnerable for years in the wake of emergencies. Already we are receiving reports of women and girls vulnerable to violence in the aftermath of the typhoon that just devastated the Philippines.

The United States has made it a high priority to address GBV especially in two of its egregious forms -- trafficking in persons and female genital cutting. In August 2012, President Obama issued an executive order to launch a multi-year U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally. This initiative builds on the U.S. National Action Plan on Peace and Security and other existing State Department and USAID policies on gender equality and women's empowerment.

But the challenges to preventing GBV and providing adequate services to victims remain vast and complex. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, both systematic and opportunistic GBV continues to occur with extreme brutality. Adding to the challenge of addressing such attacks is concern that the DRC military has been the largest perpetrator of abuses. In October last year, the commission heard from women's rights activists from Afghanistan where legal protections for women remain limited despite improvements since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.

They voiced extreme concern, concerns that I share about the vulnerability of women and the loss of hard earned gains for women's rights and the rights of girls as the U.S. withdraws the majority of its forces and the struggle over political power excludes the voices of many of the Afghan women. Like many around the world, I was shocked and I was horrified by the news of the ruthless gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old physiotherapy intern in New Delhi, India last December. Although that case received

international attention, most GBV crimes in India are never reported and many victims believe the legal system does not adequately protect them.

In Haiti, incidents of GBV increased amid the insecurity, displacement and lack of social services following the January 2010 earthquake. In addition, hundreds of thousands of children in Haiti have been trafficked for domestic slavery, girls that make up the vast majority of these children who are known as restaveks, and they are extremely vulnerable to sexual, physical and psychological abuse in the households that they serve.

We know that violence against women is also a weapon of war. In Colombia, unspeakable acts of violence have been commonplace against the women of that country carried out by all the armed actors. The violence continues even after women and children are displaced or seek to rebuild their lives. Colombia women, like their counterparts around the world, are often leaders in their communities and neighborhoods, and therefore targets of threats and violence. But they are not just victims. They are leaders of change and reconciliation.

This Friday, November 22nd, thousands of Colombian women will gather in Bogota to march in support of peace, an end to violence, justice and reconciliation. I hope I speak for all of us here in this room when I say that we stand with these brave women as they unite for peace and an end to violence and conflict in Colombia.

[The opening statement of Mr. McGovern is as follows:]

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for being here for this important hearing on global gender-based violence. I want to thank J.P. Shuster and the staff of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for organizing today's hearing. I also want to thank the International Rescue Committee for working with the Commission to organize this morning's excellent photo exhibit in the Rayburn Foyer. Some of these photos are set up around today's hearing room. These images are not only a powerful call to action, but they remind us of the extraordinary resilience of women and girls and their capacity to be powerful agents of change and peace in our societies. Finally, I want to thank our witnesses, especially those who travelled from Haiti and India to be with us today.

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The U.S. is hardly exempt from gender-based violence and violence against women. According to the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women, nearly one in five women and one in 71 men have been raped in their lifetime. One in four women and one in seven men have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner. Hundreds of thousands of American children each year are at risk of commercial sexual exploitation. Decades of investment in passing laws, supporting victims of violence, training advocates, lawyers, police, judges, teachers, doctors, nurses and the public are finally beginning to change how victims of physical, psychological and sexual violence are viewed by their communities and by medical, law enforcement and legal professionals. And we still have a long way to go.

In recent years, the U.S. and international community have increasingly confronted the problem of GBV in emergency situations, such as violent conflict, war and natural disasters. In such cases, vulnerable populations face an array of threats, including GBV, and often their governments, communities, and families fail to protect them. Refugees and the internally displaced, and those attempting to return home, can remain vulnerable for years in the wake of emergencies. Already, we are receiving reports of women and girls vulnerable to violence in the aftermath of the typhoon that just devastated the Philippines.

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But the challenges to preventing GBV and providing adequate services to victims remain vast and complex. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, both systematic and opportunistic GBV continues to occur with extreme brutality. Adding to the challenge of addressing such attacks is concern that the DRC military has been the largest perpetrator of abuses. In October last year, the Commission heard from women’s rights activists from Afghanistan, where legal protections for women remain limited, despite improvements since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. They voiced extreme concern – concerns that I share – about the vulnerability of women and the loss of hard-earned gains for the rights of women and girls as the U.S. withdraws the majority of its forces and the struggle over political power excludes the voices of Afghan women.

Like many around the world, I was shocked and horrified by news of the ruthless gang-rape and murder of a 23-year-old physiotherapy intern in New Delhi, India last December. Although that case received international attention, most GBV crimes in India are never reported, and many victims believe the legal system does not adequately protect them. In Haiti, incidents of GBV increased amid the insecurity, displacement, and lack of social services following the January 2010 earthquake. In addition, hundreds of thousands of children in Haiti have been trafficked for domestic slavery. Girls make up

the majority of these children, who are known as restaveks, and they are extremely vulnerable to sexual, physical, and psychological abuse in the households they serve.

We know that violence against women is also weapon of war. In Colombia, unspeakable acts of violence have been commonplace against the women of that country, carried out by all the armed actors. The violence continues even after women and children are displaced or seek to rebuild their lives. Colombian women – like their counterparts around the world – are often leaders in their local communities and neighborhoods, and therefore targets of threats and violence. But they are not just victims – they are leaders of change and reconciliation. This Friday, November 22nd, thousands of Colombian women will gather in Bogota to march in support of peace, an end to violence, justice and reconciliation. I hope I speak for all of us here in this room when I say that we stand with these brave women as they unite for peace and an end to violence and conflict in Colombia.

I would now like to turn to our witnesses for today's hearing. Along with their oral testimony, I would like to submit into the Record any written testimony provided by our witnesses. I would also like to submit the following statements for the Record:

- The Statement of Esta Soler, President and Founder, Futures Without Violence
- The Statement of Ms. Wang Chunying
- The Statement of Ms. Ma Chunmei

With that, I would like to welcome our first witness, Ms. Catherine Russell, the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues.

Ambassador Russell, welcome.

Mr. McGOVERN. And before I turn to our witnesses, I would like to yield to my colleague from Illinois, Representative Jan Schakowsky.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Well, thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, not only for holding this hearing but for your leadership and commitment to protecting the rights of women and girls around the world. I want to thank both panels, but I especially want to give a greeting and gratitude to Cathy Russell, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, and Carla Koppell, the chief strategy officer USAID.

So we know that violence against women is a humanitarian tragedy, a vicious crime, a global health catastrophe, a roadblock to social and economic development, and a threat to national security. The figures are staggering. I am not going to go over them. We will hear plenty of that today. The effects of violence are both lasting and profound. Sexual violence and the attached social stigma hinder the ability of women to fully participate in and contribute to their societies. Survivors of violence are less likely to hold jobs, more likely to live in poverty than other women.

There is evidence linking sexual harassment and violence to low female enrollment and high dropout rates from secondary schools. Women living in the midst of armed conflict, poverty and instability face a particularly desperate situation.

Two years ago I had the opportunity to travel to the Democratic Republic of the Congo -- I went with Melanne Verweir -- where rape has been used for over a decade as a low cost, low tech and horrifically effective weapon of war. In the DRC sexual violence has been systematically used to destroy communities and to instill a sense of despair and hopelessness within a population. Hundreds of thousands of women have been raped.

I want to commend the Obama administration for making this issue a priority. The Administration's Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally and the accompanying executive order directing its implementation will help ensure that all relative U.S. Government entities are working together to end this global crisis. We can do more, and tomorrow I will reintroduce the International Violence Against Women Act to require the development and implementation of a comprehensive U.S. strategy to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls internationally.

I-VAWA will promote health programs and survivor services, rule of law reform and civil and criminal legal protections, educational opportunities for women and girls, and the promotion of economic opportunities for women. Passage of I-VAWA, as I say, the International Violence Against Women Act, will give us critical tools in the fight against gender-based violence around the world.

So Mr. Chairman, all women deserve the same fundamental rights including a freedom from violence and abuse, but passing this bill is not just the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do. To borrow words from former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who said a long time ago, women's rights are human rights, and "no country," she says, "no country can succeed if half its population is left behind."

It is no coincidence that the most dangerous places to be a woman are some of the most unstable and violent regions of the world. Studies have proven that investing in women and protecting their fundamental rights strengthens entire communities. Combating violence against women is a critical step toward promoting regional and global stability. As my leader Nancy Pelosi has said, in the United States, when women succeed America succeeds. I think it is also true when women succeed the world succeeds.

So I want to thank you again for holding this hearing. Look forward to our witnesses.

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your statement. And I would like to submit into the record any written testimony provided by the witnesses, but I would also like to submit the following statements for the record. The statement of Esta Soler, president and founder of Futures Without Violence; the statement of Ms. Wang Chunying; the statement of Ms. Ma Chunmei.

[The information follows:]

**Hearing: The Global Gender-Based Violence Threat
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
U.S. House of Representatives
November 20, 2013**

**Statement of Esta Soler
President and Founder, Futures Without Violence**

On behalf of Futures Without Violence, I would like to thank the members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for holding this congressional hearing on one of the most compelling causes of our time: ending violence against women and girls globally.

For more than 30 years, Futures Without Violence has led the way and set the pace for groundbreaking education programs, national and international policy development, professional training programs, and communication campaigns designed to end violence against women, children and families around the world. In 1994, FUTURES (then the Family Violence Prevention Fund) was instrumental in developing the landmark Violence Against Women Act passed by the U.S. Congress. Ten years later, FUTURES built a major coalition with experts from across the United States and around the world and played a critical role in the development and introduction of the International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA), which is poised for reintroduction with bipartisan support in the House and Senate in the days ahead.

This hearing could not come at a more opportune moment. In the last several years, advocates across the United States and local leaders around the world have celebrated new U.S. government initiatives that provide a diplomatic, programmatic, and policy framework for the prevention and reduction of gender-based violence internationally. Most notably, we applaud the U.S. government for presenting the first ever U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally (U.S. Strategy) and U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP) -- two historic policy frames that align closely with provisions in the IVAWA. These initiatives aim to institutionalize efforts to achieve gender equality, promote women's empowerment, and end gender-based violence, and to weave this priority into the permanent fabric of U.S. foreign policy. In addition to the important work undertaken by the U.S. government to implement the U.S. Strategy and the National Action Plan, FUTURES celebrated early this year when the U.S. Congress reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act, which included important provisions to end child marriage internationally and also reauthorized the Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

This is a critical moment because there is an unprecedented worldwide call to end this violence. Who are the people that are demanding change? This growing global movement is made up of leaders of nations large and small, international agencies and financial institutions, nongovernmental organizations both global and local, and of women and men collaborating with local leaders of diverse communities, ethnicities, faiths and political affiliations, all of whom recognize that gender inequality and violence against women and girls are among the greatest barriers to global development, security, and prosperity.

Most importantly, this global movement is driven by the voices of those who risk their safety every day to demand basic human rights. I am talking about the girl, age 10, who refuses to be married to a man 40 years her senior, to settle a family debt. The teen who musters the courage to say, 'I was raped' -- even when family and community stand against her. The father who goes without food so his daughter can attend school, driven by hope that education and economic opportunity will protect her from a violent husband, a rampaging soldier, and the sex traffickers who prey on those with little prospects for a better life. The young girl who says no to breast ironing, rejecting the notion that only by delaying puberty can she deter possible rape. Violence against women and girls is an emergency *every* day and affects women and girls in *every* country.

All too often, the world's leaders are moved to act in the face of critically urgent and high profile emergencies, like the earthquake in Haiti and now the tragic aftermath of the typhoon in the Philippines. These crises demand urgent action – and it is imperative that such action takes into account the heightened vulnerability of women and girls to become targets of violence, sexual assault, and trafficking.

In regions of armed conflicts like the Democratic Republic of Congo, horrific sexual and physical violence are being committed against women and girls, often as a tool of war. These horrendous crimes are nothing less than a war on the next generation, and a tool for the destruction of communities and ultimately nations. The devastation they cause will be felt long after the fighting has ended. We need a response that is sustained and durable enough to address not just today's emergencies, but also those that lie ahead.

Often when the focus is on the debilitating epidemic of global violence against women and girls, someone will say that it's a part of a particular culture, or region, or religion. They are saying that it's about 'them,' not us. That attitude leads to resignation, hopelessness, and inaction.

In fact, all over the world mothers and fathers love their daughters and their sons, and want for them what we want for our children: The chance for them to learn and grow, thrive and prosper, without fear, degradation, and the trauma associated with violence.

With each passing day, there is a growing understanding of the correlation between improving the status of women and girls and achieving peace and prosperity. Nations that promote gender equality and empower women and girls, and that remove the often formidable barriers for women and girls to access education, secure safe employment, participate in civic life, and live free from violence, also experience reductions in the rates of HIV and AIDS, declines in incidents of child and maternal mortality, improvements in economic productivity, and the enrichment of participatory and democratic government. When we eliminate violence against women and girls and empower women and girls, everyone benefits. The reality is that real change will only come when we stand together to stop this violence. There is a role for each of us.

The International Violence Against Women Act codifies many of the groundbreaking initiatives undertaken by the U.S. government that are having an immediate and direct impact in saving the lives of women and girls around the world. Most notably, the IVAWA:

- Establishes the Office of Global Women's Issues at the Department of State that is responsible for developing and coordinating government-wide implementation of the U.S. Strategy and the National Action Plan, and reporting back to the U.S. Congress on progress;
- Underscores that stopping violence against women and girls must be a critical diplomatic, programmatic, and funding priority for the U.S. government;
- Recognizes the need for an intentional and comprehensive approach for ending gender-based violence that focuses initially on a few select countries with strong local partners and clear data collection to measure outcomes and inform best practices.

We need the U.S. Congress to stand together and affirm with unquestioned conviction that gender-based violence is not only deplorable, but is an issue that requires U.S. leadership. We need the U.S. Congress to move beyond the rhetoric and to pass – and fund – the International Violence Against Women Act.

Stopping violence against women and girls is a moral imperative, but it is also an essential feature for building stable democracies, enabling economic development, and improving global security. This is an issue that rises above partisan politics. It is about the promotion of universal human rights and about creating a better world for everyone. Thank you.

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
Congressional Hearing: The Global Gender-Based Violence Threat
2:30 pm – 4:30 pm, Wednesday, November 20, 2013
2175 Rayburn HOB, US Congress

Testimony submitted by
Ms. Wang, Chunying, a Victimized Falun Gong Practitioner at Masanjia Camp in China

My name is Wang Chunying. I am 59 years old. Before I retired, I worked at a hospital as manager to the nursing staff. Before practicing Falun Gong, I suffered from various diseases, including chronic gastritis, colitis, arthritis, and chronic thyroiditis, which required lifelong medication in order to control my thyroid function. I lived my life in constant pain.

I started practicing Falun Gong in 1998. In just a few days, all my physical ailments dissipated. I became healthy and happy. When my sisters witnessed the enormous changes in me, they also started to practice Falun Gong.

Ever since Jiang Zemin launched his horrifically inhumane persecution on Falun Gong, the lives of my sisters and I fell from heaven straight down to hell. My elder sister was sentenced to three years in prison; my younger sister was sentenced twice to a total of seven years in prison. I was sent to the notorious Masanjia Labor Camp twice for a total of five years and three months. I was severely tortured there.

On the morning of December 29, 2007, I refused to sign the required form for all inmates because the first item on the form was an admission of guilt. I practice Falun Gong in accordance with Falun Gong's principles of Truthfulness, Compassion and Forbearance to be a better person. That is not a mistake. That is not a crime. It is exercising my freedom of belief granted by the Communist Chinese constitution. So, I refused to sign. The Brigade Commanders Zhang Chunguang and Li Mingyu, the Director-General Zhai Yanhui, and a total of six prison guards put me through the form of extreme torture known as Diagonal Hanging (see Photo Exhibit 1).

This is done by handcuffing both hands, one to the upper bunk of an iron bed and the other to the lower bunk of another iron bed. In this way, a person can neither stand up nor squat down. The hands are tightly jammed by the handcuffs; soon the hands will swell up and turn blackish purple. Shenyang weather is minus 17 or 18 degrees Celsius (zero degree Fahrenheit) in the winter, but I was sweating profusely with excruciating pain. The police officers were still not satisfied. They kicked the beds hard with their feet so that my arms were further stretched. I felt my body was being ripped apart. Every two or three hours, the guards would shake my handcuffed hands to make sure my pain would intensify. I felt as if fistfuls of salt were being sprinkled on my open wounds. I was hung up thus for 16 hours, without a morsel of food or a drop of water, and without being allowed to use the toilet. My hands were swollen like risen dough; the skin on my wrists was cut in innumerable places by the handcuffs and caked with dried blood.



(Photo Exhibit 1 - Diagonal Hanging)



(Photo Exhibit 2 - Hanging Up High)

The second time I was submitted to torture was October 7, 2008, again for refusing to admit my guilt and sign the required form. This time, the current Masanjia Labor Camp Director Yang Jian, the current Brigade Commander Wang Yanping, the former Brigade Commanders Zhang Chunguang and Li Mingyu, and two male prison guards from the Division of Corrections Peng Tao and Zhang Liang, put me through another form of torture known as Hanging Up High (see Photo Exhibit 2).

Police officers Peng Tao and Zhang Liang handcuffed my hands tightly, wound up both my wrists with long pieces of cloth, and affixed my upper limbs to the head of the bed. Then, they stood at the foot of the bed, one on each side, and viciously pulled at my feet. My whole body was stretched from the head of the bed to the end of the bed. My full body weight was all pressed onto my wrists. At that point, they tightly wound a six-inch wide cloth tape around both my knees and feet. In so doing, I became completely immobile. My whole body felt as if it were being torn apart. Sweat poured forth uncontrollably. My clothes were dripping wet. I nearly lost consciousness. My hands and wrists soon turned purple. The ordeal lasted 23 hours. This torture was far worse than the previous one. I felt I had passed on to another world. The piercing pain is impossible to describe even if I were to exhaust all words in the human language. A nurse appeared and told me to swallow some heart pills. Being in the medical field, I knew this medicine is a rescue drug that can only be prescribed by a doctor. To take it without a doctor's order can be life-

threatening. So, I refused to open my mouth. The nurse pinched my nose and hit my mouth until I could not hold my breath any longer but had to gasp for air. The nurse swiftly stuffed nine heart pills into my mouth. Even after all that, Wang Yanping and Peng Tao still tugged at my hair and slapped me on both my cheeks.

On May 12, 2008, about 200 people at Masanjia's First and Second Battalions were all given blood tests. Because I refused to have my blood tested, several guards stepped forward to pull me over. I held tightly to the door handle, struggling with all my might, but was finally overcome by nine prison guards, including the two male guards from Masanjia Hospital who were there to draw blood. I was forced down onto the bed. I could not move a muscle, so I called out: "Falun Dafa is good! To persecute Dafa disciples is a crime!" Wang Yanping grabbed a pillow and stuffed it into my face. Suddenly, everything went dark. I was unable to come up for air. I desperately shook my head from side to side and hit my head on the wall. In so doing, I somehow found a little breathing gap between the pillow and the wall, and narrowly escaped death by suffocation. Otherwise, today, I would not be able to tell my experience of persecution in the Masanjia Labor Camp. That was how they succeeded in drawing 5 milliliters of my blood.

I have spent 30 years with the nursing profession. I have done biochemical tests and am knowledgeable that for liver function and kidney function tests, only 2 milliliters of blood is needed. They drew 5 milliliters instead. They must have had other, ulterior motives. With me at Masanjia, there was a Dafa disciple Xin Shuhua from Benxi, who was also tortured repeatedly. Masanjia's political commissar Wang Naimin said to her, "Aren't you practicing being compassionate? So be compassionate and donate your heart." To which Xin Shuhua replied: "I would need to be alive in order to practice." Wang Naimin answered: "It's not up to you. I will send you off to Sujiatun." Sujiatun is the name of the hospital that has been exposed as possibly having harvested a large number of organs from Falun Gong practitioners. Wang Naimin then promptly gave Sujiatun Hospital a call. The hospital said it would do a pick-up at 9 o'clock that evening and would send over a vehicle. But no vehicle showed up. The next day, Wang Naimin called the hospital again. An afternoon pick-up was scheduled, and again it was a no show. The same thing happened the third day. Finally, Wang Naimin couldn't do anything and let the matter drop.

With me was also Wei Yanhua, a Dafa disciple from Tieling. Wang Naimin told her, "Just look at you and I have to send you to Sujiatun." One night in 2005, Wei Yanhua was taken away by several male police officers and was never heard from again. The various forms of torture, which I suffered at the Masanjia Labor Camp, represent but the tip of the iceberg of the persecution that Falun Gong practitioners are forced to endure.

I appeal to the international community to please initiate an independent investigation into Masanjia's alleged crimes based on the evidence, and release the findings, so that all those involved in the persecution of Falun Gong will be tracked down and brought to justice, so that all the injustices Falun Gong practitioners have undergone and are still undergoing at Masanjia can be redressed. Thank you very much!

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
Congressional Hearing: The Global Gender-Based Violence Threat
2:30 pm – 4:30 pm, Wednesday, November 20, 2013
2175 Rayburn HOB, US Congress

Testimony submitted by
Ms. Ma, Chunmei, a Victimized Falun Gong Practitioner in Northeast China

My name is Chunmei Ma. I am a Falun Gong practitioner from the northeast region of China. I used to suffer from bronchitis, a bone spur in my upper spine, and various injuries arising from a car accident. Soon after taking up the practice of Falun Gong in July 1997, all of these ailments faded away. It felt like a new life had been granted to me, and I tried to show my gratitude by being a good person and living up to the standard of Falun Gong: to be truthful, compassionate, and tolerant. I had never been so happy.

On July 20, 1999, however, a dark cloud of suppression came to steal away my happiness, along with that of the millions of other Falun Gong practitioners who had similarly found fulfillment through the practice. Since that fateful day when the Chinese Communist Party began persecuting my beliefs, I have been arrested four times, sentenced to forced labor camps twice, and have been repeatedly tortured within inches of death.

At first, I trusted that the government would honor my constitutional rights. I went to Beijing to appeal to the central government, but I was arrested on Tiananmen Square. On November 16, 1999, I was taken to Heizuizi Women Forced Labor Camp in Changchun City, Jilin Province.

My detention at the camp began with being thrown, alone, into a damp, dimly lit cell for more than 20 days. Guards beat me, cursed at me, and threatened me on a regular basis. They deprived me of sleep for three days and nights. Sometimes, they would send in other prisoners to beat me up, and occasionally, they would shock me with electric batons.

One of the beatings stands out vividly in my mind. A guard named Wang Xiaolan (female) led the session. I was knocked to the ground, and while my hand was out for support, Wang kicked off my right thumbnail. The co-opted prisoners involved stuffed a dirty rag in my mouth to prevent me from making any noise. They tied my two thumbs with thin rope, cutting off the circulation, and slapped my face repeatedly with a bamboo board. I do not know how long it lasted.

After being removed from my solitary cell, I joined the main camp population in performing slave labor for 18 to 19 hours per day. We made sculptures of birds and fish, assembled children's books, toothpicks, chopsticks and other things that were to be exported. Our hands all bled, and when we went to the bathroom we never had time to wash our hands. The chopsticks were incredibly unsanitary, and I've seen the same packaging and style of the ones I worked on at Chinese restaurants in America.

At one point, I went on hunger strike and refused to do the slave labor. Guards then used an electric baton to shock my head. They tied me, spread eagle, to a metal bed and inserted a rubber tube up through my nose and into my stomach to force-feed me. To teach me a lesson, they removed and re-inserted the rubber tube continuously, which caused terrible pain.

From May to June in 2000, the 610 Office, a communist party-controlled organization that oversees the persecution of Falun Gong, demanded an increase in brainwashing efforts. They called for a 100% "forced transformation" rate among detained practitioners, which led to cruel mental and physical torture in

the interrogation room. During one of these “transformation sessions,” the guards shocked my neck and face with two electric batons. Burned and disoriented, they threw me to the ground, stomped on me, pulled my hair, punched and kicked me. It was extremely painful and terrifying. I felt so dizzy and that I threw up and eventually lost consciousness. The beating must have continued while I was out because I remember waking up with pain in different parts of my body. When I tried to stand up, they beat me again. Third Warden Fu Yufen (female) said to me, “You will not tell anyone about this. No one saw us beat you.”

I was deprived of visitation from my family members. I was not given any change of clothes nor many opportunities to wash myself or my clothes. Lice and scabies made my entire body itchy and inflamed. Co-opted prisoners kept me under constant monitoring. Every aspect of life in the camp was torture, so one day I stood up in the dining hall and exposed these crimes to the 700 or 800 people there. A group of guards tackled me, covered my mouth, and dragged me away. The pain and fear were too much, and I began banging my head against the wall in order to knock myself out. They drug me up two flights of stairs and hung me up by handcuffs. After I regained consciousness, the guards cuffed me onto a metal bedframe spread eagle for three full days. I was provided no food or water.

On one occasion, a doctor with the surname Li and a guard named Sun Jia (female) locked me in a medical room. They talked outside for a while, then came in and said, “We are going to inject some glucose into you.” I suddenly lost feeling throughout my body and my stomach had a burning sensation. One of them said, “Why isn’t her body reacting? It seems it hasn’t worked.” I knew then that they had injected me with some kind of drug, so I refused to cooperate when they came again the next day.

Ever since that strange injection, my legs were swollen, and I could not walk. My feet were in extreme pain. The bottoms of my feet shed a thick layer of skin. The symptoms lasted about one month, and I was left very weak from the experience. Two days later, the guards took me to Jilin Provincial hospital ostensibly to check my blood, but they refused to let me see the results. Guards Sun Jia (female) and Jin Lihua (female) threatened to take me to a mental hospital if I did not cooperate. My husband was had been told about the hospital trip and was waiting all day to see me. I was in such terrible condition that it brought him to tears.

I had a good family. My husband used to tell others proudly, “My wife has become a better person after she started practicing Falun Gong.” He told everyone he would wait for me, even if I was held for ten years. But after years of threats, lies, and pressure, he filed for divorce in 2003 while I was imprisoned.

I personally know more than 10 Falun Gong practitioners who were tortured to death. More are still missing. I was extremely fortunate to escape China and come to America in October 2006, and I now use all my energy to call on all kindhearted people around the world to help stop this brutal persecution.

My sister Chunling Ma also practices Falun Gong. She used to have a serious blood disease, but after she began to practice Falun Gong in 1995, her disease was cured. She and I used to love reading, exercising, and discussing with each other before the persecution. It’s been so long since we’ve seen each other, and last year she was sentenced to two years in Masanjia Labor Camp. I know the torture she suffers first-hand. She is there right now, and I want to ask all the kind-hearted American people: Please help to rescue my sister Chunling Ma. Thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. And again, I want to thank the International Rescue Committee again for their support. And again, if you haven’t had a chance to look at some of these photographs and the captions that go along with them, please, when this

hearing is over with do that. They are incredibly inspiring and they give me great hope because these women in very difficult situations want to be the future leaders of their country. They are aiming high. They want to be journalists and doctors. They want to help improve the quality of life in their communities, and I found it really uplifting and inspiring.

There are a lot of people in this audience today who have been working on these issues for many, many years. I am very grateful for that. My friend Catherine Porter is here, who was one of the founders of this commission that we now are able to have to conduct hearings on human rights, so we appreciate her support.

And our first two witnesses will be Catherine Russell, the ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues of the Department of State, and also Carla Koppell, the chief strategy officer at USAID, former senior coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. We are thrilled that you are both here, and Ambassador Russell, we will begin with you. Thank you for being here.

STATEMENTS OF CATHERINE RUSSELL, AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE FOR GLOBAL WOMEN'S ISSUES, DEPARTMENT OF STATE; AND CARLA KOPPELL, CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER AT USAID

STATEMENT OF CATHERINE RUSSELL

Ambassador RUSSELL. Thank you very much, Representative Schakowsky. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both very much for your leadership and for calling this hearing. I very much appreciate the opportunity to testify. I am honored to be here with all of you to discuss this critical importance of preventing and responding to gender-based violence globally. I would like to express my appreciation to the commission for your commitment to promote and defend international human rights including women's rights.

It is fitting that we gather now to discuss these issues, as Monday marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the first of 16 days' campaign against gender violence which concludes on Human Rights Day, December 10th. My job as Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues is to promote the principle that advancing the status of women and girls is essential to achieving America's diplomatic goals. That peace, security, prosperity, economic growth cannot be achieved without the full and equal participation of women, and that men and boys are important partners in this effort.

Violence against women and girls is a global epidemic. It crosses every social and economic class, ethnicity, race, religion and education level, and transcends international borders. It takes the form of early enforced marriages, sexual violence and traditional harmful practices among others. Violence occurs both outside and inside the home and often increases with instability. For example, we see heightened levels of gender-based violence in conflict and post conflict settings, in refugee and displaced person camps and following natural disasters.

The use of rape as a tactic of war is yet another egregious form of gender-based violence that disproportionately affects women and girls. Worldwide, an estimated one in three women will be physically or sexually abused in her lifetime, and one in five will experience rape or attempted rape. As you said, this is completely unacceptable. Gender-based violence is also a public health challenge and a barrier to social, political and economic participation. It undermines the dignity, overall health status and human rights of the millions of individuals who experience it as well as the public health, economic stability and security of nations. That is why addressing gender-based violence is a cornerstone of this administration's efforts to promote women's empowerment and gender equality around the world.

While serving as chief of staff to Dr. Jill Biden, I led an interagency effort to develop the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally. This administration launched that report in August of 2012. It is my hope that this

strategy and the accompanying executive order from the president will make a significant difference in our efforts to ensure that all persons can live free from violence.

This work also complements and builds upon the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security which aims to protect women and advance their participation in conflict, post conflict and relief and recovery settings. It is estimated that women and children make up more than 75 percent of displaced populations worldwide. At the U.N. General Assembly this year, Secretary Kerry announced Safe from the Start, an initiative to prioritize the needs of women and children at the onset of emergencies. With an initial funding commitment of \$10 million, this new State USAID initiative will assess and address the needs of women and girls in emergencies.

We have also been working closely with other donor countries around the world, including the U.K., to advance this policy priority including through coordination on the U.K.'s Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative and through Secretary Kerry's recent announcement that the U.S. will chair the Call to Action to Address Violence Against Women and Girls in Emergencies this coming year. Whether we are responding to the link between violence and HIV/AIDS as part of PEPFAR, stemming the tide of trafficking in persons, responding to humanitarian crises, providing training to law enforcement and judges, or engaging with civil society, we factor in the concerns of women and seek ways to provide support to survivors and activists working to address violence.

In partnership with our friends at USAID, the State Department supports efforts to help local governments investigate and prosecute crimes of gender-based violence. We provide legal and psychological services to survivors, support prevention efforts by educating communities and engaging with critical stakeholders including men, boys and religious leaders, and we support capacity building to enhance the ability of media and civil society to address these issues. We also work with the private sector to identify creative and innovative programs to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. We work to create opportunities through investing and education and entrepreneurship that will help women and girls overcome barriers and empower them to be less vulnerable to violence, exploitation, brutality and abuse.

I want you to know that I am personally committed to this effort and I will use all the resources at our disposal to reduce the problem of violence. Martin Luther King, Jr., famously said that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice. I believe this is true for women worldwide. All around the world governments and people are beginning to recognize that global stability, peace and prosperity depend on protecting and advancing the rights of women and girls. This is certainly not to say that every day there are not millions of women whose potentials are stifled by violence, by early enforced marriage, by misguided notions of honor and traditional harmful practices, or by barriers to education, credit and equal rights under the law.

But we have seen that when a girl has the chance to go to school, has access to health care and is kept safe from violence, she will marry later, have healthier children,

and earn an income that she will invest back into her family and community breaking the cycle of poverty. We have seen that integrating women's perspectives into peace negotiations and security efforts help prevent conflict and can lead to more durable peace agreements. And we have seen women entrepreneurs lifting up families and entire communities. We have seen what is possible. We know that empowering women and protecting them from violence will lead to stronger families, stronger communities and stronger nations. I look forward to working with all of you to further this effort. Thank you very much.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much. Ms. Koppell?

STATEMENT OF CARLA KOPPELL

Ms. KOPPELL. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the commission. I want to thank the commission for highlighting today the problem of gender-based violence as well as the good work being done at USAID, by our colleagues at the State Department, and by nongovernmental organizations here today as well.

As you the chairman and commission member Schakowsky and Ambassador Russell have eloquently noted already, gender-based violence is a terrible epidemic. For me personally, I would just say that it is appalling that 38 percent of murders of women globally are reportedly committed by their intimate partners. That some ten million girls per year are married every year before they reach the age of 18, and that almost 50 percent of all sexual assaults worldwide are against girls 15 years and younger. And I think that it is critical that we recognize the women with disabilities are two to three times more likely to suffer abuse and that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons are also facing heightened risk.

To shine a spotlight particularly on the consequences of this for development, USAID undertook a study in Bangladesh that found that actually the cost of domestic violence alone was equivalent to two percent of the country's gross domestic product, nearly equal to the amount of the government's annual expenditures in health and nutrition. And the United Nations' Secretary General 2005 study on violence against women calculated that gender-based violence in just 13 countries costs us some \$50 billion. So the consequences of gender-based violence are individual at the community level to nations and to the global community.

And while USAID has worked to prevent and combat gender-based violence for over two decades, under the Obama administration the U.S. has put gender equality and the advancement of women and girls at the forefront of U.S. policy. A range of policies and strategies align with the proposed International Violence Against Women Act and much of our activity is consistent with its spirit. Over the last two years, USAID has reinvigorated and strengthened its work on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Ambassador Russell mentioned the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security as well as the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence.

Those have been also coupled with the U.S. Government Action Plan on Children in Adversity, the USAID Counter-Trafficking in Persons Policy, the USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy as well as our vision for ending child marriage and addressing the needs of married adolescents.

Each of these policies and strategies is synergistic and complementary, places gender-based violence prevention and response as a prominent focal area for work and provides a foundation for robust action. Overall emphasis is placed on concerted efforts to strategically address the epidemic, integration of attention to gender-based violence throughout programming whether sector programming related to development or humanitarian relief and peace building efforts.

Having created what I would say is a very robust foundation, we are firmly focused on implementation which consists of several components. Whether that is staff training, and we have trained over a thousand of our staff whether in person or online, and we have trained around our gender equality policy in over 500 personnel on our Counter-Trafficking In Persons code of conduct; whether that is through the online mandatory modules we have put in place for all staff to ensure that they are paying attention, or through the services and technical assistance that involved setting aside additional operating funds to enable travel in support of gender-based violence related programming; whether it is related to amending our Automated Directives System, which is a system of policies and procedures to align with all those policies and strategies and ensure that the commitments we have on paper become real in terms of program; whether that is in terms of our reporting requirements where we have now put in place a series of indicators, several of them mandatory, three specifically related to gender-based violence to track and account for our work and the impact of that work around the world; or whether that is through the creation of incentive funding programs in 2013 through which we are providing seven new missions with additional funding in support of work on gender-based violence programs in countries including Ethiopia, Georgia, India, Zimbabwe, Guinea, South Africa and Kenya.

For me it is particularly appealing to come in and talk to you a little bit about and highlight some of the programs that we feel are most effectively doing the work to combat, prevent and respond to different forms of gender-based violence around the world. Some programs focus specifically on issues related to gender-based violence such as child marriage, so there is the Safe Age of Marriage Project in Yemen which uses awareness raising sessions in schools, mobile clinics and community venues, and actually has seen the reported age of marriage rise to 14 to 17 from 10 to 17 with real results and implications for health, education and the well being of these women and girls.

But I want to focus particularly on programs that are showing how we can integrate attention to gender-based violence in various sectors because that really is thrust of where we are moving. So, for example, in the health sector we look at the Meseret Hiwott program in Ethiopia, which leverages funds from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, PEPFAR, in Ethiopia's Amhara region and has reached over 220,000 married adolescent girls who have been involved in girl groups and has a parallel

program called Addis Birhan that has reached married adolescent boys because, as Ambassador Russell has said, it is essential to work with both males and females in combating this epidemic.

Or whether it is our rule of law, democracy rights and governance programs which show how effective interventions around gender-based violence can be in Guatemala where we have provided technical assistance and material support for the 24-hour court, which since opening its doors in October 2012 has already issued over 800 protection measures for women, over 300 arrest warrants, and in total over 125 people sent to prison when previously there was no record of prosecution for these kinds of abuse; or in Ethiopia where we have worked with village elders, the Ethiopia Women Lawyers Association and the Ministry of Justice to raise awareness about harmful traditional practices such as early marriage and female genital cutting, advocacy work that resulted actually in the ratification of a new law that increased the legal age of marriage from 16 to 18.

We also have looked at programs like our Safe Schools Pilot which started in Ghana and Malawi but has now been replicated in the Dominican Republic, Senegal, Yemen, Tajikistan and DRC. And what we have seen is already changes in attitudes and beliefs relating to whether or not sexual harassment was permissible which we feel is the first step towards prevention. We have also formed a partnership today with the Peace Corps to use the Safe Schools material and train volunteers to create a safe classroom environment and to integrate gender equitable practices into their teaching and classroom management.

The same could be said around economic growth, where in South Africa, for example, we have an Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity project which is really focusing on how microfinance schemes and awareness raising can work together to decrease the risk of intimate partner violence and is now reaching tens of thousands of households and has been progressively and cautiously scaled up; or in our programs to promote the use of innovation and technology where, for example, in India we are expanding the use of innovative CommCare mobile technology to enable and monitoring identification, counseling and referral of gender-based violence cases to municipal primary health care centers; or launching the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Campus Challenge Tech Contest which has created a community of over 2,000 students from around the world who are exploring innovative technological solutions to combating trafficking in persons.

Ambassador Russell referred to, and I just want to amplify the emphasis on gender-based violence in situations of crisis and conflict because it is a serious concern. And so in Syria, currently, we are supporting medical services for GBV survivors through women's health centers, mobile clinics and outreach teams that provide services to women who desperately need it. In response to the typhoon in the Philippines, we are working with our humanitarian partners to identify and mitigate protection risks through health, food, relief commodities, and water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance activities.

And our Disaster Assistance Response Team is closely monitoring protection risks and has a specific protection advisor to support partners in addressing all of these concerns.

And we are very fortunate to be working with the Department of State on implementation and realization of Safe From the Start. In the past year, USAID programs have reached over one million survivors of gender-based violence and girls at risk of violence.

I do also want to note the strong connection between today's topic and the women's participation and empowerment within decision making processes. As Ambassador Russell said, we know that women's participation will broaden the scope of peace agreements and increase the likelihood that gender-based violence is addressed. Through our Global Women's Leadership Fund we have already been working with women in Cote D'Ivoire, Burma, Libya, Yemen and Syria to ensure that their voices are heard and that they can pave the way for addressing gender-based violence throughout.

So a great deal is underway and yet there is much that still needs to be done. We have developed a critical priority country list based on prevalence data as well as information about the ability of countries to move this agenda forward. Those countries will now be examining the extent to which their investments are strategic and need to be augmented. We are harvesting results through our Demographic and Health Survey as well as programs that are on the ground to see whether or not, what works and how it is effective and with what impact on the ground, and we look forward to using that to help us scale up interventions and move those forward.

And finally, a robust research agenda is helping us figure out the kinds of interventions that are most important, have the biggest results on the ground and will allow us to really staunch the trend towards increased gender-based violence in many of the countries around the world where we are working.

In closing, USAID is hard at work refining our tools and interventions to effectively address gender-based violence. We appreciate the contributions of many of our colleagues who are in this room as we fight this epidemic which undermines development and offends human dignity. Thank you for your leadership on this issue and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The statement of Ms. Koppell follows:]

**TESTIMONY BY CARLA KOPPELL,
CHIEF STRATEGIC OFFICER,
U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
NOVEMBER 20, 2013**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Commission. I want to thank the Commission for highlighting today the problem of gender-based violence, as well as the good work being done at U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), by our colleagues at the State Department, and by the non-governmental organizations here today.

The Problem

Gender-based violence cuts across ethnicity, race, class, religion, education level, and international borders. An estimated one in three women worldwide is beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence experienced by women globally. An appalling 38% of all murders of women globally were reported being committed by their intimate partners. Gender-based violence can also take the form of harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, so-called “honor killings,” bride abductions, and child marriage. An estimated 10 million girls are married every year before they reach 18. Child marriage is a practice that increases a girl’s risk of school dropout, maternal mortality, short birth intervals, and vulnerability to other forms of gender-based violence, among other adverse outcomes. Children are particularly vulnerable to violence, especially sexual abuse. According to the United Nations Population Fund, almost 50 percent of all sexual assaults worldwide are against girls 15 and younger. In 2002, 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 years experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence. Sexual violence is also often used as a tactic of war during conflicts. In the context of humanitarian crises and emergencies, civilian women and children are often the most vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and abuse because of their gender, age, and status in society. Women with a disability are two to three times more likely to suffer physical and sexual abuse than women with no disability. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons also face heightened risk.

Gender-based violence undermines not only the safety, dignity, overall health status, and human rights of the millions of individuals who experience it, but also the public health, economic stability, and security of nations. A USAID funded study in Bangladesh found that the cost of domestic violence is equivalent to two percent of the country’s Gross Domestic Product – nearly equal to the amount of the government’s annual expenditures in health and nutrition. Developing countries are not alone in bearing this enormous cost. The United Nations Secretary-General’s 2005 in-depth study on violence against women found that when calculated across 13 countries (Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Chile, Finland, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States) this cost amounted to USD 50 billion per year.

USAID’s New Strategic Position on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment

For over two decades, USAID has partnered with non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, and host government institutions to increase awareness of the scope of the problem and its impact, improve services for survivors of violence, and strengthen prevention efforts. Under the Obama Administration, the United States has put gender equality and the advancement of women and girls at the forefront of U.S. foreign policy. The Administration put in place several policies and strategies that align with the proposed International Violence Against Women Act.

Over the last two years USAID has reinvigorated and strengthened its work on gender equality and women’s empowerment, launching a number of new synergistic policies and strategies at the national level to bolster our efforts, including the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, the U.S. Government Action Plan on Children in Adversity, Counter-Trafficking in Persons Policy, and USAID’s Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy. These have all highlighted our commitment as a government to address gender-based violence.

Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy

Although many gender gaps have narrowed over the past two decades, substantial inequalities remain across every development priority worldwide – from political participation to economic inclusion – and remain a significant challenge across all sectors in which USAID works, particularly in the most low-income and conflict-affected countries and among disadvantaged groups. The Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, released in March 2012, strengthens our capacity to support women and girls by ensuring our efforts are integrated and based in rigorous analysis – and knits together all our gender policies to ensure that they are working together.

Building on the Agency's decades of experience, the new policy provides guidance to our staff in Washington and in the field on pursuing more effective, evidence-based investments in gender equality and female empowerment and incorporating these efforts into our core development programming. The policy focuses USAID investments on three overarching outcomes:

- Reduce gender disparities in access to, control over and benefit from resources, wealth, opportunities and services - economic, social, political, and cultural;
- Reduce gender-based violence and mitigate its harmful effects on individuals; and
- Increase capability of women and girls to realize their rights, determine their life outcomes, and influence decision-making in households, communities, and societies.

National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

In December 2011, in support of the UN Security Council-adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, USAID along with other USG agencies developed the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security. USAID is investing in gender equality and women's empowerment in crisis and conflict-affected countries to promote the rights and well-being of women and girls and to foster peaceful, resilient communities that can cope with adversity and pursue development gains. We are changing the way we do business and implementing programs across the spectrum of crisis prevention, response, recovery, and transition to advance the five objectives outlined in the National Action Plan: (1) Institutionalize a Gender-Responsive Approach to Peace and Security; (2) Promote Women's Participation in Peace Processes and Decision- Making; (3) Protect Women and Girls from Violence, Exploitation, and Abuse; (4) Engage Women in Conflict Prevention; and (5) Ensure Safe, Equitable Access to Relief and Recovery.

United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally

The United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally was developed in August 2012 in collaboration with agencies across the U.S. Government to establish a government-wide approach that identifies, coordinates, integrates, and leverages current efforts and resources. It sets concrete goals and actions to be implemented and monitored by federal agencies.

USAID is working to build on its global reach and expertise in development and humanitarian assistance to maximize the impact of Agency efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Our goals are an increased share of the population that views gender-based violence as unacceptable and USAID resources focused on strategically addressing the most prevalent forms of gender-based violence in each country where we work.

USAID is committed to developing and implementing effective measures for preventing and responding to gender-based violence and changing the behaviors that perpetuate it. The Agency recognizes the need to focus on gender-based violence prevention, especially by elevating the voices of local actors, including civil society organizations, to address the underlying traditions, social norms, and cultural beliefs that perpetuate, condone, and exacerbate gender-based violence, gender inequality, and human rights violations or abuses.

In addition, the plan directs staff to sharpen program priorities by considering gender-based violence early in the development of the mandatory Country Development Cooperation Strategies and project design. This ensures gender analysis is conducted at the appropriate time to assess and strengthen gender-based violence programming, identify and scale up successful interventions, collaborate in piloting an inter-agency approach and invest to close data gaps. Finally the plan emphasizes the importance of elevating women and girls as leaders and agents of change across all areas of programming, engaging men and boys as allies, including and addressing the needs of underserved populations, and collaborating with civil society and the private sector.

Child Marriage Vision

In October 2012, USAID developed Ending Child Marriage and Addressing the Needs of Married Adolescents: The USAID Vision for Action. In line with USAID's Implementation Plan of the Gender-based Violence Strategy, the Vision highlights the need for development efforts to combat child marriage

to focus on regions, countries, and communities where interventions to prevent and respond to child marriage are most needed and most likely to achieve results.

To end child marriage and meet the needs of married children, USAID must leverage the expertise and skills of local change agents and international stakeholders, and maximize the impact of established best practices. USAID's Vision for Action provides guidance for our staff to end child marriage, ensure that boys and girls can reach their full potential, foster gender equality, and promote girls empowerment.

U.S. Government Action Plan on Children in Adversity

Crafted in coordination with seven U.S. Government departments and agencies — the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Health and Human Services, Labor, and State, USAID, and Peace Corps— the December 2012 Action Plan on Children in Adversity is the first-ever whole-of-government strategic guidance on international assistance for children in adversity. Children in adversity include those affected by HIV/AIDS, in disasters, or who are orphans, trafficked, exploited for child labor, recruited as soldiers, neglected, or in other vulnerable states. This effort builds on the success USAID investments in child survival, integrating assistance and measuring results to ensure that children ages 0-18 not only survive, but thrive. The Action Plan aligns different funding sources across the participating agencies and vulnerability categories for children with three principal objectives: (1) Build Strong Beginnings: Increase percentage of children surviving and reaching full developmental potential. (2) Put Family Care First: Reduce percentage of children living outside of family care. (3) Protect Children: Reduce percentage of girls and boys exposed to violence and exploitation.

USAID Counter-Trafficking in Persons Policy

In February 2012, USAID launched a new Counter-Trafficking in Persons Policy to reinvigorate and focus Agency efforts to combat trafficking on concrete, measurable principles and objectives. We are also expanding investments in countries with global strategic importance and significant trafficking problems, and are strengthening Counter-Trafficking in Persons programming in conflict- and crisis-affected areas. Our programs draw upon innovation, technology and private-sector partnerships.

Institutionalizing Gender-conscious Programming

Awareness, sensitization, training, and technical assistance

USAID has made great strides in institutionalizing the awareness of gender-related considerations in programming and raising consciousness regarding the need to address gender inequality to achieve the attitudinal and behavioral changes needed to cement development gains. As staff understand the need to pay attention to gender inequality, they are increasingly seeking resources to help them learn how to improve their programming. Currently, over 1,000 staff have taken either online or in person trainings related to gender equality. In addition, through mandatory orientation training for new civil service and foreign service employees as well as at a June 2013 workshop for foreign service officers from around the world, USAID has trained over 500 USAID personnel on Counter-Trafficking in Persons and the Code of Conduct. In order to train the majority of the Agency on gender equality and female empowerment issues, USAID developed and launched the Gender 101 online staff training module and offers in-person regional trainings. Two more online courses are being developed.

USAID missions can also tap into technical assistance through mechanisms and personnel in Washington with expertise on gender-based violence. Our technical experts help missions sharpen their program priorities and review mission work with an eye to integration of gender-based violence prevention and response strategies. Because USAID has found that an efficient way of encouraging integration of policy guidance is development of toolkits targeted to particular sectors, there are two new toolkits under development - focused on integrating gender-based violence prevention and response into economic growth programs, and rule of law projects.

Amending USAID's Automated Directives System

The policies and procedures that guide USAID's programs and operations are contained in a reference compendium called the Automated Directives System (ADS). In July 2013 USAID issued ADS Chapter 205, Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle. This new chapter

explains how to implement policies and strategies to reduce gender inequality across the Program Cycle and applies to all policy and operations in Washington and the field. It also elaborates on the requirements in ADS 201, 202, and 203 for integrating gender equality and women's empowerment in all phases of programming, budgeting, and reporting. We also anticipate changes that reflect the requirements of the Gender Equality and Female Empowerment policy in the ADS 300 and 400 series to come out in the near future.

Amending Reporting Requirements

Reporting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in budgets and performance management is a requirement of a suite of State and USAID policies. Subsequent to the release of the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security and the GBV Strategy, the guidance was revised to specify what type of gender-based violence operating units are addressing and, to the extent possible, the location they are working in. This guidance includes nine standard indicators for operating units to use, three of which are specific to gender-based violence. These indicators allow us to better track the focus of investments and monitor progress.

Incentive funding

USAID established an incentive fund in 2013 to encourage missions to integrate gender-based violence prevention and response efforts into their portfolios, with an emphasis on building upon existing activities that can have a broadly transformative impact and are good candidates for scale-up. Twenty-three missions submitted proposals, evidence of great interest from our missions to address gender-based violence, and seven missions received FY2013 incentive fund awards.

Promising Programming and Results

I am pleased to highlight for you positive results we are seeing from an illustrative sampling of programs worldwide.

Health

USAID invests in both prevention and response to child marriage because marriage before the age of 18 is a practice that undermines efforts to promote sustainable development – including in health, where child marriage increases the risk of maternal mortality, obstetric complications, infant mortality and malnutrition compared to children of mothers older than 18.

An example of an integrated and multi-sectoral program to address child marriage is the Meseret Hiwott program in Ethiopia. Leveraging programs funded by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in Ethiopia's Amhara Region, USAID has reached more than 220,000 married adolescent girls since 2008 through the Population Council's Meseret Hiwott program, which involves the formation of girls groups which meet 3-5 times a week to discuss issues of family planning, reproductive health, power dynamics, financial literacy, and access to HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections services. Parallel Addis Birhan programs for married adolescent boys host discussion groups focused on the same topics, as well as partner communications, non-violent and respectful relations, and caring for wives and children.

An example of a stand-alone child marriage program is the Safe Age of Marriage Project, a USAID-supported program in rural Yemen that used community mobilization efforts to increase age of marriage. This project included awareness sessions at schools, mobile clinics, and community venues on the importance of keeping girls unmarried – and culminated in a community pledge to ban child marriage and set marriage dowry at 400,000 Yemeni Riyals to deter trade marriage. As a result, the most commonly reported age of marriage among girls aged 10 to 17 rose from 14 to 17 over the duration of the project. The project also helped avert 53 girl-child and 26 boy-child marriages and helped to appoint the first-ever female school principal in Al Sawd District. This community mobilization intervention is now being replicated in two new districts of Yemen.

Rule of Law and Democracy, Rights, and Governance

Many countries understand that strengthening the Rule of Law can assist in preventing gender-based violence, and have developed good laws. However, where many countries fall short is in implementing the laws, which is critical to deterring future gender-based violence.

In Guatemala, USAID provided technical assistance, training, and equipment to operationalize a new specialized 24-hour court located in the Attorney General's Office for cases related to violence against women, exploitation, sexual violence and human trafficking. The new model opened in October 2012 and includes a criminal court, a public defense office, a police substation, and a forensic clinic, and is staffed by prosecutors, psychologists, doctors, and lawyers. The integrated approach ensures victims receive the timely assistance they need and strengthens criminal investigation by using scientific evidence. This court, one of the first in Latin America, represents a fundamental change in Guatemala's justice system. Since the 24-hour court opened its doors, 846 protection measures for women and 307 arrest warrants have been authorized. In total, 125 people have been sent to prison for violence against women and sexual exploitation.

In Ethiopia, we worked with village elders, the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and the Ministry of Justice to raise awareness about harmful traditional practices such as early marriage and female genital cutting. This advocacy work resulted in the ratification of a new law increasing the legal age of marriage from 16 to 18.

Education

When girls are educated, their families are healthier, they have fewer children, they wed later, and they have more opportunities to generate income. One extra year of primary school boosts a girl's future wage 10 to 20 percent and an extra year of secondary school increases that earning potential by 15 to 25 percent. Education also helps mothers take better care of their children. According to the World Bank, each additional year of female education reduces child mortality by 18 per thousand births.

USAID's Safe Schools Pilot Program worked to reduce school-related gender-based violence in selected schools in Ghana and Malawi to support the longer-term goal of improving educational and health outcomes for girls and boys. Changes in student and teacher knowledge, attitudes and practices toward school-related gender-based violence were used to measure progress toward reducing violence. The program provided over 30,000 girls and boys with prevention programs and support services. By the end of the project, teachers and students exhibited changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices. In Ghana, prior to the program, roughly 30 percent of teachers agreed that sexual harassment of girls occurred in schools; after the program that number increased to nearly 80 percent. Teachers' belief that boys could experience sexual harassment increased by 38 percent—from 26 to 64 percent. This awareness is a critical first step in prevention.

The Safe Schools pilot was scaled up to include activities in the Dominican Republic, Senegal, Yemen, Tajikistan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Training manuals were translated into Spanish, French, Arabic, Tajik and Russian and adapted to the local context. Furthermore, USAID formed a partnership with the Peace Corps to use the Safe Schools materials and train volunteers on how to create a safe classroom environment, integrate gender-equitable practices into teaching and classroom management, and promote primary school reading.

Economic Growth

In South Africa, USAID is supporting the scale-up of the Intervention With Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity (IMAGE) Project. The IMAGE project sought to find evidence about the scope of women's empowerment and the mechanisms underlying the significant reduction in intimate partner violence documented by the cluster-randomized trial in rural South Africa. The findings, both qualitative and quantitative, indicate that economic and social empowerment of women can contribute to reductions in intimate partner violence. The IMAGE intervention combined a microfinance program with participatory training on understanding HIV infection, gender norms, domestic violence, and sexuality.

After 2 years, the risk of past-year physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner was reduced by more than half. Reductions in violence resulted from a range of responses enabling women to challenge the

acceptability of violence, expect and receive better treatment from partners, leave abusive relationships, and raise public awareness about intimate partner violence.

The project was scaled up in various phases from 2001 onwards. During its trial period (2001-2004), the intervention was delivered to 860 women and scaled up by mid-2007 to reach 3,000 households in more than 100 villages. After the impact evaluation in 2008, a new institutional structure was designed to reach 15,000 households by 2011-2012 in a high risk area surrounding proposed mining developments in South Africa's rural northeast. USAID will support further scale-up of IMAGE from 2012-2015, and it will cover 6,000 additional microfinance loans.

Innovation and Technology

In India, USAID is expanding the use of innovative CommCare mobile technology to address gender-based violence effectively and uniformly in primary health care settings. This approach builds on a pilot program currently underway in Bengaluru to apply mobile technology for facilitating and monitoring identification, counseling and referral of gender-based violence cases in municipal primary health centers.

In response to President Obama's October 2012 call to action, USAID launched the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Campus Challenge Tech Contest (www.challengeslavery.org), growing a community of over two thousand students from around the world to explore innovative technological solutions to combat trafficking in persons. To deepen that effort, USAID launched a Challenge Slavery Tech Contest in Ukraine this October. Implemented by MTV EXIT along with designated youth ambassadors, the contest is soliciting innovative ideas for the use of technology to raise awareness and promote social action to combat trafficking in persons in Ukraine.

Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Crisis and Conflict

USAID is working to strengthen gender-based violence prevention and response through a range of humanitarian and development activities designed to mitigate risks of gender-based violence, provide comprehensive services for survivors, combat impunity, and promote women's participation in critical peace and transition processes.

All USAID humanitarian assistance programs seek to reach the most vulnerable populations—women, children, persons with disabilities, the elderly—who often face extraordinary levels of violence and abuse. Sadly, women and children often fare the worst in war, and the crisis in Syria is no exception. Gender-based violence is a serious concern for Syrians. To address this, we're supporting medical services for gender-based violence survivors through women's health centers, mobile clinics, and outreach teams that provide health and psychosocial services to women who desperately need it. In addition to these targeted interventions, we require all of our programs – no matter what type of humanitarian assistance they are providing – to ensure that they are meeting the unique needs of vulnerable populations and promoting their safety. Simple solutions can be life-changing: instead of setting up women's bathing spaces in a camp, which women and girls feel shy about using, our partners are setting up multi-purpose women's spaces, in which women and girls can bathe, wash clothes, wash dishes and socialize.

Similarly, in response to Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, USAID is working with our humanitarian partners to identify and mitigate protection risks through our health, food, relief commodities, and water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance activities. The Disaster Assistance Response Team in the Philippines is closely monitoring protection risks, including gender-based violence and trafficking in persons, and USAID has deployed a protection advisor to support our partners in addressing these concerns.

The U.S. Government has a strong commitment to protecting women and girls through humanitarian action but we recognize that there is still more work for us to do as a government and as an international community. In September, Secretary Kerry announced a new \$10 million initiative called Safe from the Start. This initiative is a joint effort between USAID and our colleagues in the State's Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration. It builds on the momentum of the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security and the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender Based Violence Globally. What is unique about Safe from the Start is that it is focusing our efforts on gender-based

violence prevention and response at the very outset of emergencies. The goal is to permanently transform the global humanitarian architecture so that women and girls are never needlessly at risk in emergencies and that survivors receive appropriate care – not as an afterthought but as standard practice.

In the past year, USAID programs have reached more than 1 million survivors of gender-based violence and girls at risk of violence with medical, psychosocial, legal, and economic assistance in countries affected by conflict and natural disaster. These services are critical for helping survivors recover and rebuild their lives, and prevent recurrent cycles of violence and victimization. USAID is investing in building the evidence base for survivor-centered services that can be successful even in difficult, low-resource settings.

For example, in FY 2012, USAID's Victims of Torture program supported 43,000 survivors of violence in eastern DRC with integrated services, including psychosocial counseling and opportunities to join savings and loan associations. USAID-supported research on the mental health components of this program published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* documented positive results for survivors participating in therapy. In the study, women from 16 villages in DRC, who had experienced or witnessed sexual violence and showed symptoms of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, were randomly assigned to receive individual support or group cognitive processing therapy (CPT). Compared to women who received individual support, women who received group CPT showed a stronger reduction of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms and combined depression and anxiety symptoms at the end of treatment. The percentage of women participating in group CPT that met criteria for these conditions dropped from 70% at baseline to 10% or less after treatment; the percentage of women in the individual support group who met those criteria only dropped from 83% at baseline to 42-53% after treatment. This type of learning is helping us scale-up and adapt successful approaches in crisis and conflict environments.

Even as we strengthen our support for survivors, we know that impunity for conflict-related sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence is a major challenge for prevention. This year USAID provided funding to support a state-of-the-art training with Justice Rapid Response on the investigation of gender-based violence under international law. The training expanded the number and regional diversity of experts available to serve on a dedicated roster of gender-based violence experts that provides the international community with a rapidly-deployable, stand-by capacity to investigate these crimes. The training focused on Middle East and North Africa-region experts and Arabic-speaking interpreters—a region where this is great need for this expertise right now. Already several of the participants are serving or preparing to serve on the commissions of inquiry looking into allegations of human rights violations in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Another focus of USAID efforts is building the capacity of local institutions—both government and civil society—to address gender-based violence. In the next year, we're planning programming to improve the response of police to incidents and implement a network of safe shelter options for gender-based violence survivors in Sierra Leone and to support inclusive transitional justice in Northern Uganda through support for documentation, reporting, and prosecution of crimes committed against women and girls during the conflict in that region.

Finally, I want to note the strong connection between today's topic and women's participation and empowerment within decision-making processes -- peace negotiations, transition dialogues, donor conferences focused on post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction. We know that women's participation broadens the scope of peace agreements and increases the likelihood that gender-based violence will be addressed in transitional justice, constitutional drafting, security sector reform, reconstruction, and other activities that are happening in transitional societies. We are working with our State Department colleagues to bring diplomatic and development resources to bear to support inclusive peace and transition processes to ensure that women have a voice in these important decisions. USAID, for example, is supporting a program called the Global Women's Leadership Fund with partners to increase women's ability to influence some of the most consequential political processes in developing and post-conflict countries. In addition to providing logistical support for women's participation in a number of high-level proceedings, the Global Women's Leadership Fund has conducted activities in places such as

Côte d'Ivoire, Burma, Libya, and Yemen, as well as provided opportunities for Syrian women to gather and strategize about increasing women's influence and input in planning for a peaceful, democratic future for Syria.

Ongoing and Future Efforts to Address Continued Need

Operationalizing key country strategy

USAID has developed a critical priority country list to focus its programmatic priorities in preventing and addressing gender-based violence. This was done through an assessment of the prevalence of selected forms of gender-based violence, mission capacity, and host country will and capacity. The priority countries will be expected to examine the extent to which their investments are strategic and transformative and to explore gender-based violence integration into their existing programming and will be eligible for additional funding and technical assistance.

Harvesting results and creating virtuous cycle

Building off the lessons from Safe Schools, USAID is scaling up its work to prevent school-related gender-based violence through the Empowering Adolescent Girls to Lead through Education (EAGLE) project. USAID and PEPFAR are working together to ensure thousands of adolescent girls in the DRC make successful transitions to secondary school. Just 11 percent of Congolese women over age 25 have secondary educations, and studies show that keeping girls in school dramatically reduces their vulnerability to HIV and improves overall health outcomes. A five-year \$15 million initiative, EAGLE seeks to raise this rate by tackling many of the barriers keeping girls from continuing their post-primary educations – including cost and school safety – by improving knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding sexual gender-based violence prevention and response, and gender equality within schools. The program will emphasize leadership training and increase self-efficacy regarding life choices for girls.

Capture results and enable learning across the Agency

The Agency has made significant contributions in the area of data collection and analysis through support of tools such as the Demographic and Health Surveys, which routinely collect essential data on fertility, family planning, maternal child health, gender, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, and malaria. Since 1984, more than 260 surveys have been collected in over 90 countries. The Agency continues to support the development of key research.

USAID's research agenda aims to help inform some identified gaps in existing data collection and research on the following topics, among many others: (1) identifying strategies for scaling up effective gender-based violence programs through a literature review and field research in the sectors of education and youth, economic growth, democracy and government and health; (2) developing monitoring and evaluation tools for gender-based violence interventions in pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis phases; (3) investigating the relationship between women's economic empowerment and gender-based violence, and identify promising programmatic approaches that support women's economic empowerment and reduce the risk of gender-based violence; (4) investigating the effectiveness of financial and economic incentives (such as conditional cash transfers) in preventing child marriage in high-prevalence areas of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa; and (5) engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

In closing, USAID is hard at work refining our tools and interventions to effectively address gender-based violence, and we appreciate the contributions of many of our colleagues in this room as we fight this scourge that undermines our development goals and offends human dignity. Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, thank you very much and I want to thank you both for your testimony. And let me also ask unanimous consent to ensure into the record a statement entitled, "Afro-Colombian Women Refuse to Continue Being Unarmed Victims."

[The information follows:]

November 20, 2013

Afro-Colombian Women refuse to continued being unnamed victims

"Violence is rooted on discrimination fueled by stereotypes" CEDAW Committee

Angela Arboleda, sofocated and stabled; Claudia Patricia, her throat cut; Dalila Quiñonez killed along with her partner; Maria Luisa Espinoza, killed; Marley Yuliza Ramirez, killed; Maria Nerida Holguin, killed with a machete; Yenny Edith Belalcazar, shut to dead; Estella Cortes, sofocated and her throat cut; Epifania Mondragon killed by her partner.

We named some; many might never be identified, reported or found. Their names and faces will persist only in the memory and heart of those who loved and care for them.

Those names, and many others silenced by fear, apathy and incompetence, represent the violence and brutality that faced Afro-Colombian women in the port-city of Buenaventura between January and October of this year. "The human rights crisis facing Afro-Colombian women in Buenaventura is an ongoing story of violence fueled by the internal armed conflict, the militarization of Colombian Society and official an unofficial indifference when it comes to the plight of women," according to Charo Mina-Rojas, coordinating of the Afro-Colombian Women's Human Rights Defenders Project.

The lack of attention to this crisis and the indifference from governmental authorities is the reason that women in Buenaventura have organized themselves to demand justice and an end to the sexism and patriarchal system that devalues the lives of Afro-Colombian women.

Women will rally in Buenaventura Thursday November 21st at 2:00 pm in front of the Attorney General's office to demand justice and protection. Many women in other cities will be rallying at the same time in support of Buenaventuras women's demands and courage.

Background:

On October 2nd, 2013 the United Nations Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), called the Colombian government's attention on the egregious high levels of impunity and conclude that the Colombian State must "ensure that the protection of the Afro-Colombian and indigenous rights prevail over the profit interests of third parties". Are those third party interests settled on Free Trade Agreements that maintain silent and ineffective the authorities in Buenaventura with the blessing of the national government.

The **Afro-Colombian Women Human Rights Defenders Project** continues demanding recognition of paramilitary groups mainly responsible for these crimes, investigation, prosecution and protection of women victims, and insists on a recommendation endorsed by the CEDAW Committee to "establish a standard system for the regular collection of statistical data on violence against women, disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, type of violence and the circumstances in which the violence was committed, including the perpetrator and victim and whether they were related to each other" (recommendation 16.e), so no other women who fall victim of violence remind unnamed.

Women in Colombia are claiming "Not one more!"

ACWHRD exhorts all women in Colombia and beyond to strike back against violence rejecting these crimes by mobilizing on November 21 at 2:00 pm with Afro-Colombian women

Mr. McGOVERN. I know that you are on a timetable so I want to ask some questions quickly, and they may not necessarily be in the order that I would have originally done so. But we are going to hear from a witness from Haiti on the second panel. The restavek or child slavery system in Haiti entails young children being sent from their homes to live in domestic servitude with other families, and often the system prevents young girls and boys from going to school and can expose them to multiple forms of violence. The causes and consequences of the restavek system are directly related to economic, political and social issues throughout the country.

How is the restavek issue being addressed throughout U.S. foreign assistance to Haiti? Not just through the child protection programming, but as part of initiatives related to economic opportunity, access to education and political participation? Ms. Koppell, you may want to –

Ms. KOPPELL. Sure. So the response to Haiti with regard to gender-based violence is one that is growing in its amplitude. I was in Haiti several months ago, and it was very interesting to visit the health, education and economic development programs and see the women's interest in integrating comprehensive attention to gender-based violence into the portfolio.

As you perhaps know, from the start of the crisis in Haiti post earthquake, there was attention focused on how we could set up the camps for displaced people in ways that would reduce the risk of gender-based violence, and since then we have been looking at different strategies for addressing that problem and ensuring that it is built in and baked into our interventions. So, for example, when I visited one program that was a health care facility they talked about microfinance enabling people who were at risk such as prostitutes from not moving back into that business at increased risk for gender-based violence as well as health consequences and moving that forward.

The safe schools program that I discussed earlier in my testimony is one that we are looking at replicating and integrating into education sector interventions in Haiti. So it is something that is part and parcel interventions in a range of different sectors and we foresee increased attention on that problem.

Mr. McGOVERN. Yes, because this is an issue when I was in Haiti I heard a lot about. I was actually not down there looking at this stuff, I was looking at visiting an orphanage in Haiti. But this seems to be a major issue. And again given the fact that this country is so involved in helping rebuild Haiti, and this practice, this so-called restavek system is so outrageous that it seems that we have some leverage here. And obviously you are talking about some ways to deal with it, but I mean it really is quite horrendous, and we are going to hear from a witness a little while later.

But maybe for both of you, what role can men and boys play in preventing gender-based violence? To what extent does the international community address boys and men as victims of gender-based violence? And in your view, do the current U.S. and

international programs that combat violence against women sufficiently address the role of men and boys as either perpetrators or as victims of abuse?

Ambassador?

Ambassador RUSSELL. I would say there has been growing awareness that men and boys are critical in all this programming. I just returned from Afghanistan and we have a lot of focus there of course in women and girls in our programming, but it was clear to me and clear to everyone that I spoke to that they consider the next generation of boys are critically important in making sure that they understand. You can't just talk to the girls and the women about violence. You have to talk to the boys. You have to educate the boys about the value of girls, the value of women, and if you don't do that you will never be successful. And I think throughout our programming we are certainly aware of that and I think it is a place where we are doing more and more of it. I think Carla can probably speak to the specifics of how much programming we are doing on that. But I think it has become, and the policies are clear to us that there is knowing how much we should be doing, and I certainly think that on the men's side we are doing a lot of training of police and things like that. But I think just the sort of general awareness for boys and men about the importance of valuing women and treating them well is something that we are all very aware of and I think, as I said, doing more and more of that training.

Ms. KOPPELL. I think I would agree with everything that the ambassador said. There is a growing recognition that we need to work with families and communities as a whole that men are perpetrators and victims. They are also key allies and decision makers and they are influencers. And whether that is looking at actors within faith-based communities, within the justice system, within governance structures, they are the people that help us make change and that we need to work with them at all levels of intervention.

Mr. McGOVERN. You mentioned a number of executive orders and policy directives that the Administration has kind of issued to address the well being of women, including the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally, the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security and policies on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment at both USAID and at the State Department. How do these documents all relate to one another and what is the status of their implementation, and what are the obstacles that the Administration has to face when they implement these policies? Either or both.

Ms. KOPPELL. So all of the policies and strategies create a frame where there previously was none. When started a little less than three years ago, we had a 20 year old gender equality and we had women in development policy that was very outdated. What we have created, we think, is a very solid foundation that speaks to different aspects of this problem recognizing that the gender-based violence weaves throughout all of them. With that in mind, we sort of feel like we have enough of a frame, enough strategies and policies, and we need to move it forward.

And from our perspective, what is required to move it forward is training and capacity building for staff, the regulations for implementing all of those, and we are moving forward with that. Incentive funds to enable and provide the technical assistance and shape projects and programs, and we have made those available. And increased ability to have the research that fills knowledge gaps. Because the reality is, there is a great deal that we don't know both in terms of gaps in terms of data on prevalence, as well as the interventions that will work.

So one example is we talk about women's economic empowerment as a critical priority, and yet we know that if we approach women's economic empowerment in the wrong way it can actually increase the propensity to gender-based violence. So as we implement women's economic empowerment programs we want to do it in ways that reduce the threat of gender-based violence that comes with empowerment and doesn't have any unintended negative consequences. And those are the kinds of research that we need to do as we move to implement.

Ambassador RUSSELL. One of the main purposes of the strategy in gender-based violence was to make sure that the very limited resources that we have in the government would be used wisely, and yet to the extent that we could we were not duplicating efforts. And what we found was that when we brought all of the relevant players together in the government and got everyone together and figured out what everybody was doing, there was a lot of very good sort of synergy and excitement about working together. And I think that that has been, really, one of the most remarkable sort of developments from our perspective, of getting everybody in the same place, sort of moving everybody in the same direction, and I think that it is making us all work a little bit more effectively which I think is all to the good.

Mr. McGOVERN. Which leads me to my last question. One of the things that we do in addition to kind of highlighting human rights issues, we look for ways that we can be helpful so that we can steer our colleagues in a direction where we are actually doing something constructive which is sometimes not easy to do. But what is it we can do here, more? Is it funding? Do we need to do anything legislatively? Is there something that we can do to help kind of advance your agenda? Because I think I speak for my colleague from Illinois, I think that we admire the work that you are doing and we support the work you are doing. We want to make sure it is effective. We want to make sure that it is implemented. We want to make sure that these issues are tackled with sooner rather than later and that we have effective strategies. So what is it that we can do here to help you in your work?

Ambassador RUSSELL. I would say two very important things. One is to stay engaged as you are, because I think you're paying attention is critically important and makes a huge difference to what we are doing. Because sometimes, I think, not to beat a dead horse, but, literally, coming back from this Afghanistan trip, there is so much concern there that we are going to, especially among the women that I met that the United States is going to forget them and forget the strides that they have made. And so I

think to the extent that you continue to pay attention to that and don't forget the women who are there, I think that will help them tremendously.

And I think paying attention to the issue generally by doing things like this, holding hearings like this, is tremendously helpful because I think as much as we live this issue every day, people in the country, I think they are busy doing their own things. It is hard to follow this every day. It is not what people do. But I think when you bring the great attention that you can to this issue, I think that is tremendously helpful to the Congress and to the women who are facing these problems around the world, because I think it really illustrates the fact that the United States is a leader on these issues and can play a powerful role in bringing other countries to the table, and also just making a difference in getting this issue dealt with appropriately.

And the second thing is, I do think we are always happy to have any funding that you would like to send our way, so I think it is incumbent upon us obviously to use that funding well, and I think it is important for us to stay in touch and work together on that and make sure that we are doing things. And I think it is important for us to have a strong relationship so you understand what we are doing, what AID is doing with the money, so that you see that it makes sense. But certainly there are lots of things that we could do in addition to what we are doing.

Ms. KOPPELL. I think I can't emphasize enough how important it is hold hearings like this. I mean, you can see from the number of people here today that there is more interest than there are hearings of this sort. The other thing I would emphasize is you holding us accountable. And when I say us, I mean the U.S. Government. As you said, we have now a raft of executive orders, policies and strategies. They are relatively new and we can talk about what we are doing, but it is not completely implemented yet and it is not comprehensive and we want it to get legs for the long term. And that will require it being about the continuity and making this woven into the DNA of the work of the U.S. Government and that only happens from continuing to be held accountable to these policies and strategies as we move forward.

Mr. McGOVERN. And perhaps we could maybe call you back at some point then, get a status report. And just one final thing. I know that you recently visited Afghanistan, Ambassador, and I think we are equally concerned about the fate of a lot of women as the U.S. draws down. I mean, there are some of us, I will speak for myself, who do want to draw down, who don't want to be there militarily forever. And it would be helpful to us in the coming weeks and months if you can help us identify areas that we can be helpful, other than keeping U.S. troops there forever and ever and ever. Whether it is in terms of funding or whether it is in terms of highlighting some of the progress that is being made or some of the programs that are there, I want you to feel free to contact us with some ideas and ways that we could be helpful because we are deeply concerned about that issue as well.

Ambassador RUSSELL. I appreciate that and I know that the women appreciate that too, because I think they have made incredible strides with a lot of help from here in

the States. I had a meeting the other day with Representative Schakowsky and she and I talked about this as well that they are afraid of what is coming and I think they want to know that we are still with them, and I assured them that we are. There is a lot of interest from AID and a big commitment from AID going forward, but I think we need to just keep our eye on the ball. I think that is the most important thing. And so your interest is tremendously helpful and I will definitely come back to you with –

Mr. McGOVERN. Absolutely.

Ambassador RUSSELL. Thank you for that.

Mr. McGOVERN. Yes, I would like to think after all the money we have spent in that government over there perhaps we can get some commitment from the government as we draw down that they will respect some of the strides that women made. I think that is something that we ought to be able to hold them accountable on.

Ambassador RUSSELL. Well, I agree. And I think it goes to the point that we believe that women, the success of that country, we believe, is based on the involvement of women in that country.

Mr. McGOVERN. Absolutely.

Ambassador RUSSELL. So it is critically important that that happens.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you for your good -- Jan?

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Well, let me suggest to my colleague, one of the ways that I think we can be helpful and all members can be helpful is to pass the International Violence Against Women Act which is being introduced tomorrow. And really it has been a coalition effort, 52 organizations have participated in the language. And I know that Ambassador, you worked on a very early version years ago on the National Violence Against Women Act, and one of the things it would do would be to codify to make permanent the office of the ambassador-at-large for Global Women's Issues, and also the senior coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment at USAID. So it wouldn't depend on any particular administration, but that those offices would be in place and have some very specific strategies.

But let me ask you, given our current situation, something about the funding. So we know that foreign assistance is always targeted for budget cuts, and there is countless studies after study after study showing that the American people grossly overestimate how much we actually spend on foreign aid. And I am just wondering how much the mandatory spending cuts under sequestration, the across-the-board cuts as well as other budget cuts in recent years, affect our ability to promote the rights of women and girls around the world. And either one of you.

Ms. KOPPELL. I would have to get back to you with the specific quantification. I mean obviously any reduction in funding is a reduction in funding. That said, we worked very hard to integrate attention to gender equality and women's empowerment issues into sector programs to a larger extent and so it is difficult to juxtapose that increase in emphasis and then see where you come out in terms of a decrease as a result of funding, because I honestly believe we are doing much more for women and girls in many ways than we were just a few years ago.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. You know, there is the potential for further budget cuts along the way. Wondered if you wanted to comment on funding at all, Ambassador.

Ambassador RUSSELL. Well, I think my general point would be one I made earlier, which is that to the extent that we are investing in women and girls, I think it is a well established and great investment for the United States. Because the payback in terms of the stability that it creates in the countries that we are investing in is tremendously helpful for the United States, and it is a smart, strategic decision for us. And I think that is why, and both the secretary and the president believe so strongly in investing in women.

And so I think certainly any move to cut back on funding for women would be in my mind just foolish. It would hurt us in the long run, and hopefully we won't get to the point where we do anything like that. I think it would really –

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. I hope so. For so many years, decades really, there has again been study after study about how if you want real bang for your buck, internationally and at home as well, invest in women. If you want more stability, if you want a more prosperous country, less violent country in general, you want to invest in women. And yet, often, if you look at international budgets that truth is not followed by investment sufficient to the outcomes that we could really have. And so that is why I am really happy. And maybe you will want to say something more. It sounds like you have developed some measurement tools. I think it is really important for us to be able to explain the outcomes, quantify the value of our investments and be able to make a really strong case about how useful investing in women and girls really is. I don't know if you want to comment anymore on that.

Ms. KOPPELL. I couldn't agree with you more. I mean I think where we are now is that we need to find the specific results for our investments and that is what will make these investments self perpetuating. So we have created the, for example, the Women's Empowerment and Agriculture Index which looks specifically at whether our Feed the Future program is empowering women as part of agricultural investments, recognizing, as the Food and Agricultural Organization has found, that we could feed 150 million more people if women had the same access to inputs, female farmers, that men do. That the differentiation in terms of yields is simply due to a lack of access to seed, fertilizer, capital and extension services.

And so that index is a way we hold ourselves accountable for progress on that metric. When you look at our Development Credit Authority we are now tracking the extent to which we are serving male versus female borrowers, because we know female borrowers pay back at a higher rate and we want to make sure that gender blind doesn't mean you are not serving women because you didn't notice that they weren't part of the borrowing pool. And so I agree with you entirely, and my hope is that by putting in place these systems for tracking uniformly across our work globally we will get a very, very robust baseline of information about the projects that deliver the kinds of results we want to see, and what kind of value we are getting for money.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Ambassador, do you want to say anything about that?

Ambassador RUSSELL. No, I agree totally with what Carla is saying. I think that all the studies that we have seen from World Bank and other places say that investing in women is a smart decision to make because women take the money, they, first, as Carla said, they pay back loans in higher numbers. The money that they get they invest in their families so that they get their children immunized, they send their girls to school and their other children to school so that it is a better investment overall. Their communities do better, and we would argue that their countries do better. So we think anecdotally that there is no question it does better, that it is a better investment, and the World Bank agrees with that.

But I think the next step for us is, as Carla says, to take that and look at our actual, our policies and our investments and make sure that we are seeing that same statistical evidence. And I think Carla raises a very interesting point, which is, when we do these sometimes we don't, or in the past we haven't always broken things out by gender, so we wouldn't look at loans that way because it just isn't the way we would do it so we didn't have the data to say that men or women paid things back at the same or different rates. And so I think now we are looking at that. And so I think as we go forward we will have a lot more detail.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. I think that kind of data collection not only helps to justify the programs we have, but then compare to other spending how much or little we are actually directing toward women.

Ambassador RUSSELL. Exactly.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Because the evidence is just totally conclusive, unquestionable, that when you make those investments. And if we are not doing a sufficient amount relative to other expenditures, then we can make the case for demanding more.

Ambassador RUSSELL. Exactly. I think that is exactly right.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, I want to thank you both. And let me also thank you for, I want also to thank USAID too for the work that you are doing with Feed The Future, which is -- I deal a lot with the issues of hunger and food insecurity globally, and I am inspired by what State and USAID are doing in terms of approaching agricultural development in a different way, actually discovering that there is such a thing as women and that we ought to invest in them and that it is a good investment, and understanding the importance of building local capacity and education and good nutrition.

And I just say this, I wish that story were told to people who are not on the relevant committees that oversee this, because I think there is a lot of ignorance in Congress as to the incredible and exciting things that are going on in development, and not only in terms of combating gender-based violence but in terms of creating local economies. So I am a big booster of Feed The Future and of the work that you are doing, and we look forward to having a close collaboration here and figuring out ways we can help assist you. We will fight the money battles, we would be successful. But certainly I think the more people realize the progress that is being made, I think the more people are going to be willing to step up to the plate and provide the assistance you need and deserve. So thank you very much for being here. I know we went a little bit over, but I apologize. So thank you so much.

Ambassador RUSSELL. Thank you both very much.

Mr. McGOVERN. So we will now call our next panel. Francisca Vigaud-Walsh, senior policy and advocacy officer of Women's Protection and Empowerment Unit with the International Rescue Committee; Ravi Kant who is the president of the board of directors of the Shakti Vahini in New Delhi, India; Cristina Finch, managing director of Women's Human Rights Program, Amnesty International USA; and Guerda Constant, the executive director of Fondasyon Limye Lavi in Haiti. And I hope I pronounced that all right.

So why don't we begin with Christina. Christina Finch, thank you for being here. We will begin with you, and everybody welcome. And we are going to make sure that everybody's microphones are working too. Okay, welcome.

STATEMENTS OF CRISTINA FINCH, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA; FRANCISCA VIGUAD-WALSH, SENIOR POLICY AND ADVOCACY OFFICER OF WOMEN'S PROTECTION AND EMPOWERMENT UNIT, INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE; RAVI KANT, PRESIDENT OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS, SHAKTI VAHINI, NEW DELHI, INDIA; AND GUERDA CONSTANT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FONDASYON LIMYE LAVI, HAITI.

STATEMENT OF CRISTINA FINCH

Ms. FINCH. Thank you, Chairman McGovern and members of the commission and to the staff of the commission for their hard work to hold this hearing, and the leadership of the commission to help end gender-based violence globally. Amnesty International USA is pleased to testify at this important and timely hearing.

Today I would like to focus my testimony on the international human rights framework that exists to address gender-based violence, and offer recommendations on concrete actions that the United States Government can take to help prevent and end the violence. Our organization's campaigns to end gender-based violence around the world have produced hundreds of reports documenting these human rights abuses, offered detailed recommendations for actions by government, nonstate actors and international organizations, and clearly illustrated the connection between this violence and other violations of human rights around the world. Amnesty International's two most recent reports focus on violations in Syria and Egypt.

Violence against women takes many forms including rape, domestic violence, female genital mutilation and acid attacks to name a few. It is a global human rights crisis that exacerbates instability and insecurity around the world. But it is also an issue that affects individual women intimately. U.N. statistics show that one in three women will be raped, beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime. A shocking number, and in my opinion, a vast underestimation of the true number of women affected. I count myself among those women. As a survivor of gender-based violence myself, I know firsthand the effects that this violence can and does have on women's lives and the lives of those around them.

Over the last 25 years, violence against women has been increasingly understood and accepted as a human rights issue. Whereas violence was previously dismissed as an unpreventable consequence of war, cultural norm or simply a private matter, the international community has acknowledged that women and girls are often targets of abuse because of their gender -- whether in conflict where rape is used as a weapon of war, in communities or schools, or in the home where violence occurs in the family. These crimes are now recognized as human rights abuses that cannot be justified by war, culture, tradition, and which governments must prevent, prohibit and punish.

The rights of all women as human beings around the world were first and most fundamentally recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted in

1948 by the U.N. General Assembly, the UDHR states in clear and simple terms, rights that belong equally to all people in all nations without distinction of any kind such as race, color, sex, language or any other status. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or the CEDAW Treaty, is the first and only international treaty to comprehensively address women's rights within the political, cultural, economic, social and family spheres.

Other international instruments and resolutions address specific aspects of women's human rights, including the 1993 U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women which sets forth ways in which government should act to prevent violence; the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which was the first international treaty to identify crimes against women as crimes against humanity, war crimes, and in some instances, genocide; the Geneva Conventions which designate rape and other acts of sexual violence as war crimes and grave breaches of the Convention; the U.N. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; and finally, U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent related resolutions which emphasize the responsibility of all states to put an end to impunity and violence and to prosecute those responsible for war crimes relating to sexual and other violence against women.

The ways in which women experience human rights abuses are unique. While human rights are often understood as the rights that everyone has by virtue of their humanity, the assumption that all humans have the same experiences and needs is particularly problematic for women. Historically, states have assumed responsibility for human rights violations only when state agents or officials were the perpetrators. However, women more often face abuses from nonstate actors such as their employers, their partners, their husbands, families, friends and community members.

It is critical to note that whether abuses against women are committed by state or nonstate actors in the public or the private spheres, the state is obliged to condemn, prevent and punish all acts of violence against women and take measures to empower women. Human rights abuses against women are often complicated by further discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, caste, culture or age. The type and prevalence of violence and discrimination that women experience are often determined by how their gender interacts with these and other factors.

Amnesty International USA urges the United States to take concrete policy steps to help end gender-based violence globally. We see progress on two of our past recommendations to the commission -- the promulgation of both U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally, and the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. But much work remains to be done. Amnesty International has recommended four U.S. policy initiatives which will make a significant impact in the work to end gender-based violence globally. These are passage of the Women, Peace, and Security Act; U.S. promotion of reform of laws and policies that discriminate against women and girls; U.S. ratification of the CEDAW Treaty; and

finally, passage of the International Violence Against Women Act, which would make ending violence against women and girls a top U.S. diplomatic and foreign assistance priority.

The act would codify and implement the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally. The act provides a comprehensive framework which would support survivors, hold perpetrators accountable and prevent violence, while ensuring that U.S. foreign aid is used in the most cost effective and impactful way possible.

Amnesty's recent report on Egyptian women provides us with a poignant example of why this legislation is necessary. Dalia Abdel Wahab went to Tahrir Square in Cairo on January 25th to exercise her right to protest. Dalia's life was threatened and she was beaten and sexually assaulted by a mob of men. Like the many other women who have faced gender-based violence while peacefully protesting in Tahrir Square, her attackers have not been brought to justice. A life free from violence is a fundamental human right, yet nearly a billion women around the world will not have that freedom. To affect real change in the lives of women globally, action is needed now and the United States must continue to be a leader on this issue by passing legislation such as the International Violence Against Women Act.

Chairman McGovern, Congresswoman Schakowsky, and members of the commission, on behalf of Dalia, myself and the nearly one billion women around the world who have experienced gender-based violence, I thank you for holding this important hearing and urge you to take swift action. Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Finch follows:]

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing on “The Global Gender-Based Violence Threat”

Testimony Submitted to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing on The Global Gender Based Violence Threat

“International Violence Against Women – Stories and Solutions”

Submitted by Amnesty International USA

November 20, 2013

Thank you Chairman McGovern and Chairman Wolf, and to the Commission staff, for your hard work to hold this hearing and for the leadership of the Commission in helping to end gender based violence globally.

Amnesty International USA is pleased to testify at this important and timely hearing. Amnesty International’s testimony will focus on the international human rights framework that exists to address gender-based violence, and offer recommendations on concrete actions that the United States Government can take to help prevent and end the violence.

Our organization's campaigns to end gender-based violence around the world have produced hundreds of reports documenting these human rights abuses; offered detailed recommendations for action by governments, non-state actors, and international organizations; and clearly illustrated the connection between this violence and other violations of human rights around the world.

Violence against women takes many forms, including rape, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, child and forced marriage, and acid attacks to name a few. It's a global human rights crisis that exacerbates instability and insecurity around the world.

But is also an issue that affects individual women intimately. United Nations statistics show that one in three women will be raped, beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during their lifetime. A shocking number and potentially a vast underestimation of the true number of women affected.

Over the last 25 years, violence against women has increasingly been understood and accepted as a human rights issue. Whereas violence was previously dismissed as an unpreventable consequence of war, cultural norm, or simply a private matter, the international community has acknowledged that women and girls often are targets of abuse because of their gender – whether in conflict, where rape is often used as a weapon of war, in communities and schools, or in the home where violence occurs within the family. These crimes are now recognized as human rights abuses that governments must prevent, prohibit and punish.

Amnesty International has recommended four U.S. policy initiatives which will make a significant impact in the work to end gender-based violence globally. These are:

- Passage of the International Violence Against Women Act,
- Passage of the Women, Peace and Security Act,
- U.S. promotion of reform of laws and policies that discriminate against women and girls, and;
- U.S. ratification of the Women's Treaty, officially known as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

We see progress on two of our past recommendations to the Commission– the promulgation of both a *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally* and a U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. But much work remains to be done.

Every day, women and girls around the world are threatened, beaten, raped, mutilated, and killed with impunity. Worldwide, nearly one billion women – will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, whether at the hands of family members, government security forces, or armed groups.

Today, what unites women internationally-transcending class, race, culture, religion, nationality and ethnic origin-is the violation of their fundamental human rights, and their persistent efforts to claim those rights.

The rights of all women as human beings, around the world, were first and most fundamentally recognized by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*. Adopted in 1948 by the UN General Assembly, the UDHR states in clear and simple terms rights that belong equally to all people in all nations, "without distinction of any kind such as race, color, sex, language...or any other status."

The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* is the first and only international treaty to comprehensively address women's rights within political, cultural, economic, social and family spheres. Adopted by the UN in 1979, CEDAW provides an international standard for protecting and promoting women's human rights and is often referred to as a "Bill of Rights" for women.

The 1993 UN *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW)* sets forth ways in which governments should act to prevent violence, and to protect and defend women's rights. DEVAW calls on states to "exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the state or by private persons."

The Geneva Conventions designate many acts of sexual violence when specific conditions of torture are fulfilled – including rape, enforced prostitution, sexual slavery, and sexual mutilation – as war crimes, and grave breaches of the Conventions.

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children defines human trafficking as the illegal recruitment, sale, transport, receiving of, and/or harboring of human beings through force, deceit, coercion or abduction for the purpose of all forms of forced labor and servitude (Article 3(a)). Many cases of sexual violence during armed conflicts occur under conditions of slavery.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is the first international treaty to expressly recognize a broad spectrum of sexual and gender-based violence as some of the gravest crimes under international law, and is the first time that sexual slavery and trafficking have been expressly recognized as crimes against humanity in an international treaty. The majority of cases that have been brought before the ICC to date involve gender-based violence.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent related resolutions¹ emphasize the responsibility of all states to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for war crimes relating to sexual and other violence against women. It calls for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes and calls for the protection and respect of human rights of women and girls during the reconstruction process, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police, and the judiciary. Six subsequent resolutions have been passed since 1325 that have further protected women and girls from conflict related sexual violence and promoted their role in the peace-making process.

The ways in which women experience human rights abuses are unique. While human rights are often understood as the rights that everyone has by virtue of their humanity, the assumption that all humans have the same experiences and needs is particularly problematic for women.

Historically, states have assumed responsibility for human rights violations only when state agents or officials were the perpetrators, and certain forms of violence against women by state agents have been acknowledged as torture. However, women more often face abuses from non-state actors, such as their employers, partners, husbands, families, friends and community members. It is critical to note that whether abuses against women are committed by state or non-state actors, in the public or private spheres, the state is obliged to condemn, prevent and punish all acts of violence against women and to take measures to empower women.

When international law is applied without an understanding of the state's responsibility for abuses committed by private actors, women are denied an essential part of the protection that the human rights system is supposed to provide. When the state dismisses the majority of violence against women as private or domestic matters, thereby allowing this violence to continue, it sends a clear message that violence against women is condoned.

Human rights abuses against women are often complicated by further discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, caste, culture, or age. The type and prevalence of violence and discrimination that women experience are often determined by how their gender interacts with these and other factors.

In the case of women's human rights, the principle of universality continues to be challenged. Some justify violations of women's human rights by placing precedence on cultural values and traditions, but this view ignores the fact that some practices and beliefs termed "culture" or "tradition" often shape women's lives in a way that subordinates and discriminates against them.

¹ Including UN Security Council Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106 and 2122.

In fact, violence against women is rooted in a global culture that discriminates against women and denies them equal rights. Women today earn less than men, own less property than men, and have less access to education, employment, housing and health care. This global culture of discrimination denies women their fundamental human rights and legitimizes the violent appropriation of women's bodies for individual gratification or political ends. By limiting the universality of the human rights of women, cultural values rooted in unequal power relations between women and men become justification for the systematic denial of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

Each of the human rights treaties, and the human rights framework as a whole, are essential for the realization of women's full spectrum of rights. Whether abuses against women are committed by state or non-state actors, in the public or private spheres, the state is obliged to act. State obligations under international human rights law can be summarized under three categories:

Respect: The state has an obligation to *respect* women's human rights through its direct action, agents and structures of law. A state's constitution must recognize equality between women and men in all spheres; state or official actors must be held accountable when they perpetrate violence against women; private actors who perpetrate violence against women must be prosecuted.

Protect: The state has an obligation to *protect* women's human rights. The state must take all necessary measures to prevent individuals or groups from violating the rights of each individual. As such, the state must take affirmative steps to prevent direct and indirect discrimination against women. Women must be fairly represented in government and have legal access to all forms of employment.

Fulfill: The state is also required to *fulfill* the human rights of women by ensuring opportunities for individuals to obtain what they need and to provide that which cannot be secured by personal efforts. This obligation ranges from providing a healthy environment, clean water, food, housing and education, to creating the conditions necessary for women's organizations to form and function.

International law has developed the standard of *due diligence* as a way to measure whether a state has acted with sufficient effort to live up to its responsibilities to respect, protect and fulfill human rights. This standard has been explicitly incorporated into United Nations standards, such as the DEVAW which says that states should 'exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the state or by private persons'. Increasingly, UN mechanisms monitoring the implementation of human rights treaties, the UN independent experts, and the Court systems at the national and regional level are using this concept of due diligence as their measure of review, particularly for assessing the compliance of states with their obligations to protect bodily integrity. Any act of violence against women perpetrated in the public or private sphere whether by state or non-state actors invokes the due diligence obligations of States to prevent, investigate, punish and provide compensation for all acts of violence.²

Violence against women will continue until those responsible are held accountable under domestic laws in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law. Factors contributing to impunity for crimes of violence against women are many, and include:

- An overall climate of indifference towards many forms of violence;
- Wrongful but tacit acceptance of rape and other sexual violence as unavoidable;
- Threats and reprisals against those who reveal abuses;
- Laws granting amnesty to perpetrators as part of peace-making 'deals'.

² Gender Related Killings of Women and Girls, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 2013, <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B6XUJ0SW4C68cDdXQks0Mj14Nnc/edit?pli=1>

Governments have a responsibility to ensure that violence against women is punished in accordance with international standards for fair trials, and to that end, that the judicial system in their country functions independently of the government, and that law enforcement, judicial officials, and security forces receive adequate training to prevent and assist survivors of violence. Despite such obligations, many countries have discriminatory laws that make it difficult for women to access justice, or their laws are interpreted in such a way as to facilitate impunity.

For example, when violence against women is committed in the context of armed conflict, national courts may lack jurisdiction over soldiers who are foreign nationals or it may be impossible to seek their extradition. The code of military law may not expressly address violence against women.

What Should the United States Government Do?

Amnesty International USA urges the United States to take four policy steps to help end violence against women globally. The United States should:

Pass the International Violence Against Women Act, which will:

- Address violence against women and girls comprehensively by supporting health, legal, economic, and humanitarian assistance sectors and incorporating violence prevention and response into such programs.
- Alleviate poverty and increase the cost effectiveness of foreign assistance by investing in women.
- Support survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and prevent violence.
- Codify and implement the *U.S Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally* in five select countries which have a high incidence of violence against women.
- Permanently authorize the Office of Global Women’s Issues in the State Department, as well as the position of the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, who is responsible for coordinating activities, policies, programs, and funding relating to gender integration and women’s empowerment internationally, including those intended to prevent and respond to violence against women.
- Enable the U.S. government to develop a faster and more efficient response to violence against women in humanitarian emergencies and conflict-related situations.
- Build the effectiveness of overseas non-governmental organizations – particularly women’s non-governmental organizations – in addressing violence against women.

The I-VAWA provides a comprehensive approach to address these priorities within a human rights framework by enhancing the efficacy and efficiency of existing U.S. government programs that tackle violence against women

Pass the Women, Peace and Security Act which will:

- Increase women’s meaningful inclusion in peace-building and conflict prevention processes;
- Protect women and girls from gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict settings;
- Ensure women and girls have equitable access to humanitarian assistance;
- Require the State Department and USAID report to Congress on progress under the US National Action Plan to promote women’s participation in peace-building and conflict prevention processes;
- Ensure that each relevant US government agency integrates women as equal partners into all efforts to prevent and mediate conflict, respond to humanitarian crises, promote and build peace and democracy, and rebuild post-conflict;
- Incorporate comprehensive training programs on women’s participation in peace and security matters for diplomatic, defense, and development personnel;
- Require robust monitoring and evaluation of the impact of US foreign assistance on women’s meaningful inclusion and participation and revise approaches to employ best practices.

The Women, Peace and Security Act recognizes the untapped potential and significant value that women bring to the peacemaking table. Half of all peace agreements around the world fail within the first five years. One missing component to creating a lasting and sustainable peace is the inclusion of those who are disproportionately and uniquely affected by conflict: women. The Act requires the U.S. to promote the meaningful inclusion and participation of women in all peace processes that seek to prevent, alleviate or resolve armed conflict which will increase the likelihood of successful conflict resolution.

Promote Reform of Discriminatory Law and Policies

The United States has a responsibility to press for legislative reform and to facilitate implementation of laws and policies that ensure women the same rights as men. This is especially the case in areas of property rights, access to employment, access to health services, and education for women and girls, as well as on laws relating to citizenship, the rights to enter into marriage willingly, and to have the same legal rights as men as parents of their children.

The United States should provide assistance for legal reforms that promote and protect fulfillment of human rights for women and children, and facilitate contact and collaboration with international organizations, including the United Nations mechanisms, which can assist and advise legislatures on legal reforms and policy implementation to support women and children. The US should also increase its training of foreign security forces on addressing violence against women in armed conflict and on military codes of conduct regarding sexual exploitation and abuse.

Ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CEDAW is a landmark international agreement that affirms fundamental human rights and equality for women around the world. It offers countries a practical blueprint to achieve progress for women and girls by calling on each ratifying country to overcome barriers to discrimination.

Around the world, CEDAW has been used to reduce sex trafficking and domestic abuse; provide access to education and vocational training; guarantee the right to vote; ensure the ability to work and own a business without discrimination; improve maternal health care; end forced marriage and child marriage; and ensure inheritance rights.

Ratification of CEDAW would serve to strengthen the United States as a global leader in standing up for women and girls and provide a path for the full realization of women's human rights globally.

Amnesty's recent report on Egyptian women provides us with a poignant example of why these recommendations are necessary.

Dalia Abdel Wahab, went to Tahrir Square in Egypt on January 25th last year to exercise her right to protest. Dalia's life was threatened as she was beaten and sexually assaulted by a mob of men. Like the many other women who have faced gender-based violence while peacefully protesting in Tahrir Square, her attackers have not been brought to justice.

A life free from violence is a fundamental human right. Yet nearly a billion women around the world will not have that freedom.

To affect real change in the lives of women globally, action is needed now, and the United States must continue to be a leader on this issue by passing legislation such as the International Violence Against Women Act.

Chairmen McGovern, Wolf, and members of the Commission, on behalf of Dalia and the nearly one billion women around the world who have experienced gender-based violence; I thank you for holding this important hearing and urge you to take swift action.

Thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much for your excellent testimony. We will now hear from Francisca Vigaud-Walsh. Did I pronounce that properly?

Ms. VIGAUD-WALSH. Perfectly.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF FRANCISCA VIGUAD-WALSH

Ms. VIGAUD-WALSH. Mr. Chairman, I request that my written testimony be submitted for the record.

Mr. McGOVERN. Without objection.

Ms. VIGAUD-WALSH. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman Wolf and Chairman McGovern for calling this important hearing on the global threat that gender-based violence poses. I also thank Representative Schakowsky, whose support for making violence against women and girls a foreign policy priority of the United States has never waned. I would also like to take a moment to express my condolences to the commission members for the loss of Mr. Donald Payne who was a tireless advocate for GBV survivors in the Democratic Republic of Congo. His loss is felt in the humanitarian policy community.

During the course of my testimony, you will hear why it is critical to take bold action now to work towards a day when women and girls are free from violence. We are grateful to the U.S. Government for its role in helping to achieve this goal. My name is Francisca Vigaud-Walsh and I am the IRC Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer for Women's Protection and Empowerment. The IRC is a humanitarian aid organization working in over 40 countries. We are also supported by the U.S. refugee program to assist refugees arriving in the United States resettle and achieve self-sufficiency.

The IRC has gained a reputation for being a pioneer in the GBV field. Since we started our first program in 1996 in refugee camps in Tanzania, we have grown to become the only humanitarian agency with a technical division dedicated exclusively to working on violence against women and girls. On behalf of the thousands of women and girls with whom we work, the IRC thanks you.

We have learned a lot from our near 20 years of experience, and I would like to take my time to communicate here on this floor three key messages. One, there is no one size fits all approach to addressing gender-based violence. Two, responding to gender-based violence in emergencies is life saving. It is not optional. And the U.S. Government has the opportunity now to revolutionize humanitarian aid. First off, there is no one size fits all approach. Women and girls face myriad forms of violence in conflict settings. It is not just rape. The IRC has supported over 22,000 survivors of violence in just a fraction of the countries where we work in the past three years. Forty eight percent

of these survivors came through our doors because of intimate partner or domestic violence.

Much of our work to better understand the different needs of survivors based on their age and the form of abuse that they have been subjected to has been possible because of the support of the U.S. Government. For example, we developed with funding from the Bureau Of Population, Refugees, and Migration, the Caring For Child Survivors Guidelines, which provides targeted guidance to field staff working with child survivors in conflict and post conflict settings. These guidelines have influenced global policy and guidance for working with children. Most recently they informed PEPFAR technical guidelines for clinical care of children and adolescents who have experienced sexual violence.

The IRC knows that interventions to prevent and respond to gender-based violence are effective. For example, the IRC, with Johns Hopkins University, tested a mental health treatment for survivors of rape who were receiving case management services with us. In only 12 weeks of cognitive processing therapy administered by trained case workers, that is to say no clinicians, no significant overhead costs, we learned that the vast majority overcame crippling depression and anxiety. Sixty three percent reported decreased systems of depression and 90 percent reported a marked increase in daily functioning. These results were significant and featured in the New England Journal of Medicine. This is just one example that demonstrates that our interventions are effective, and U.S. Government investments in NGOs that work on gender-based violence are worthwhile and should be continued.

Secondly, our experience informs us that GBV prevention and response in times of emergencies must not be seen as optional but rather a life saving matter. GBV services are life saving because when a woman has been raped she has just three days to access care to prevent the potential transmission of HIV, five days to prevent pregnancy, and sometimes just a few hours to ensure that life threatening injuries do not become fatal. Because emergency response sets the stage for early recovery, a failure to address gender-based violence in the beginning provides a poor foundation for women's resilience and health in the medium and longer term and it is a barrier to reconstructing the lives and livelihoods of individuals, families and communities.

While it is often thought that women's protection can wait, the reality is the reverse. Women's protection from gender-based violence is most effective when addressed from the very beginning of a crisis. Unfortunately, gender-based violence has not been prioritized in emergencies. For example, IRC found that following the droughts in Kenya, reports of sexual violence increased by 36 percent between February and May 2012, compared to the previous three months in two refugee camps on the Somalia border. At the same time, funding for gender-based violence there decreased by 50 percent. Further, a recent protection funding study report commissioned by the Global Protection Cluster revealed that 0.39 percent, less than one percent of all humanitarian appeal funding from 2007 to 2012 was allocated to GBV interventions. Let us take some learning from this forward now to the Philippines response.

Lastly, the United States Government has the opportunity to revolutionize humanitarian assistance. The United States Government has demonstrated its concern with this panorama and is assuming leadership to take corrective actions. In September, the Department of State announced a joint initiative with the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance at USAID, Safe from the Start, a road map for the United States to take leadership in ensuring transformational change in the way donors, U.N. agencies, NGOs prioritize and operationalize GBV prevention and response efforts and humanitarian action from the onset of an emergency. The IRC enthusiastically commends the U.S. Government for developing this initiative. Safe from the Start provides a framework that if, if followed through will result in significant changes for women and girls in emergencies.

I take this opportunity before the commission to also share concrete recommendations for the State Department and USAID to consider as they further develop the road map. We would appreciate the convening of U.S. Government and NGO consultations to ensure that our lessons learned and best practices can be incorporated. It is important to consider the value added of directly financing NGOs that are frontline responders and who work in collaboration with U.N. agencies. In addition to the targeted U.N. agencies who will benefit from Safe from the Start resources, NGOs should be considered for financial support. This will allow the support base and capacity of all actors to grow and take on gender-based violence from the onset of an emergency.

Finally, OFDA is a critical partner in humanitarian action. Today the vast majority of the world's displaced are internally displaced persons rather than refugees. Being that OFDA has the U.S. mandate to provide life saving assistance to the internally displaced, OFDA has the potential to influence the mitigation of risks and humanitarian action and reach more survivors. OFDA should play a prominent role in the Safe from the Start road map and should invest resources commensurate with its mission and mandate. I will close by saying that we can keep up the momentum gained in the worldwide fight against GBV through I-VAWA which will be reintroduced tomorrow as we heard, and we thank you again Representative Schakowsky for that. The IRC encourages the members of the commission to consider its swift passage. Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Vigaud-Walsh follows:]



**Testimony by
Francisca Vigaud-Walsh
Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer
International Rescue Committee**

Presented to:
The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
James P. McGovern, Massachusetts, Co-Chairman
Frank R. Wolf, Virginia, Co-Chairman

United States Congress

“The Global Gender-Based Violence Threat”
November 20, 2013

I. Intro

Thank you, Chairman Wolf and Chairman McGovern for calling this very important hearing on the global threat that gender-based violence (GBV) poses. I also thank Representative Schakowsky, whose support for making violence against women a foreign policy priority of the United States has never waned.

I would also like to take a moment to express my condolences to the Commission members for the loss of Mr. Donald Payne, who was a tireless advocate for GBV survivors in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The humanitarian policy and advocacy community sorely misses him, but we know that his vision and commitment live on through the work of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.

Please let me begin by saying that the International Rescue Committee greatly appreciates the opportunity to appear here today, along with my peers, to testify on the issue of gender-based violence, a grave human rights violation.

My name is Francisca Vigaud-Walsh and I am the International Rescue Committee’s Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer for Women’s Protection and Empowerment. I coordinate our efforts to influence policy and practice around the response to gender-based violence in conflict and disaster-affected communities worldwide. I bring to this hearing today field experience working on the issue of violence against women and girls and the insight gained through several years living and working on the African continent and deploying as an emergency responder to humanitarian crises throughout the world. I represent and speak from the perspective of a U.S.-based relief agency that prioritizes addressing the problem of violence against women and girls in conflict.

In my testimony, after providing background on the IRC and its work on preventing and responding to GBV, I will speak to the scope of GBV globally, explain why GBV interventions are lifesaving, comment on the gains to be had by ensuring that GBV is considered in the relief to development continuum, and express our appreciation for the latest U.S. government initiatives to address GBV. Finally, I will provide some recommendations for the consideration of the U.S. Government.

II. Organizational Profile

Founded in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is a non-governmental agency working in emergency relief, rehabilitation, protection of human rights, post-conflict development, refugee resettlement services and advocacy for those uprooted or affected by violent conflict and oppression. The IRC is on the ground in over 40 countries, providing emergency relief, relocating refugees, and rebuilding lives in the wake of disaster. Through 22 regional offices in cities across the United States, we help refugees resettle in the U.S. and become self-sufficient.

The IRC is a pioneer in the GBV field. It is the only humanitarian organization to have a technical division dedicated exclusively to work on violence against women and girls. The Women’s Protection and Empowerment team (WPE) works to realize one of the IRC’s strategic goals: to secure a world where women and girls live free from violence as valued and respected members of their community, whereby they exercise their rights to promote their own safety, equality and voice.

From the time of its first response to GBV in 1996 in refugee camps in Tanzania, the work of the WPE has transformed the IRC into a globally-recognized leader in the prevention and response to violence against women and girls. The WPE now runs programs in over twenty countries across Africa, Asia and the Middle East and our team has grown to nine technical advisors providing worldwide support to hundreds of GBV staff in the field, five specialists working on a range of thematic issues (primary prevention, data and information management, economic empowerment, and adolescent girls), an emergency response and preparedness cell of deployable staff, three advocates, and knowledge management and support staff. No other NGO has made this level of investment.

The combination of the political will at the most senior levels of the IRC, with the diversity and exceptional skills of the WPE team, has allowed us to carry to fruition innovative programs that focus on providing care to women who have experienced violence as well as addressing the root causes of abuse. Our approaches recognize the inherent resiliency of women and girls and their profound potential to effect positive change in their own lives and communities. In order to help restore the dignity of GBV survivors and create opportunities for women and girls to rebuild and transform their lives, we focus on the following programmatic areas:

1. Provision of Services

Providing essential health services and support to survivors of violence. This is the bedrock of the IRC's approach. For women and girls subjected to violence, the ability to access immediate health care and psychological support can make the difference between a life lived with dignity and one lived in shame. We do not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. We tailor services to specific needs, such as those of child survivors.

2. Violence Prevention

The IRC tackles the root causes of violence against women. By working with community groups and local institutions, our programs help to change attitudes and support women and girls to realize their potential, free from violence. Because we know that violence against women and girls is fueled by patriarchal attitudes, beliefs and power dynamics that socialize men and boys, we invest in primary prevention through engaging men to become agents of change, and to be accountable for their roles in perpetuating the cycle of violence.

3. Empowering Women and Girls

The IRC created programs to enhance the economic participation of women and girls as a means to preventing and recovering from violence. We pair our economic interventions with a social outcomes whereby by women and their male partners also participate in discussion dialogue groups. These discussion groups aim to address the harmful gender norms that make violence possible and enhance women's ability to remain in control of the resources she earns. When women have control over resources, it increases their status in their households and communities, providing more chances to participate in the decisions that affect their lives

4. Research and Learning

The IRC is committed to developing new and better approaches to respond to and prevent violence against women and girls to ensure our work is effective and apply lessons learned to new projects being developed. The IRC has conducted cutting-edge research projects across Burundi, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to reduce domestic violence, empower women, support the recovery of survivors, meet the specific needs of child survivors and change social norms around violence. We have conducted a three-year evaluation to assess the effectiveness of a GBV Emergency Response and Preparedness capacity building package, designed to equip emergency responders with the knowledge, confidence, and skills needed to address GBV in emergencies. We are undertaking a mental health impact evaluation in the DRC to determine how to best facilitate the healing and recovery of survivors of sexual violence. The IRC works alongside noteworthy academic institutions such as the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health and Yale University's School of Public Health to ensure the rigor of our research approaches.

5. Advocacy

Ending violence against women requires political action. At the local level, the IRC seeks to empower women and girls to advocate for the changes that will improve their lives. The IRC's global advocacy team lobbies for the international community to redouble its efforts to prevent and respond to violence. 2012 saw the launch of a new project entitled *DRC and Beyond*, which mobilizes the public and policymakers to bring attention and commitment to ending violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as the release of a groundbreaking IRC report on domestic violence in West Africa. This year, we are using our academic research to influence best practices. Further, we are working with donor countries, including the U.S., to develop roadmaps to address GBV within their development and humanitarian aid assistance frameworks.

The IRC's global investments in staff capacity, specialized programming areas and learning have positioned the IRC as an organization that influences global policy and practice. Specific initiatives and achievements include:

- The IRC has supported over 22,000 survivors of violence - in just a fraction of the countries where we work – in the past three years. In 2012 alone, the IRC mobilized over 982,000 men, women and children to lead prevention efforts in their communities.
- Every year the IRC trains and educates more than 2.5 million men and women in ways to prevent violence against women and girls.
- The IRC developed a new program model for ending the sexual exploitation of girls. *Girl Empower* is designed to equip girls with the skills and experiences necessary to make healthy, strategic life choices and to stay safe from sexual exploitation and abuse. The program responds not only to girls' heightened exposure to harm in humanitarian and post-conflict settings, but also to the vital roles they can play in building healthier families and stronger communities. This resource for adolescent girls, ages 10-14 years, specifically focuses its aims on keeping girls safe from sexual abuse and exploitation in countries affected by conflict.
- The IRC developed an innovative model called *EASE (Economic and Social Empowerment)* that gives women financial stability and helps enhance their status in the households. After a successful launch in Burundi, the IRC has implemented *EASE* programs in Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia.
- The IRC developed a primary prevention intervention resource package called *Engaging Men through Accountable Practice (EMAP)*. *EMAP* provides staff in humanitarian settings with an evidence-based curriculum and field-tested approach for engaging men in individual behavior change to prevent violence against women and girls, guided by the voices of women. The *EMAP* framework, Accountable Practice, provides a method and structure for honoring women's leadership and developing male engagement in a way that improves, rather than endangers, the lives of women and girls.
- The IRC developed the *Caring for Child Survivors (CCS)* Guidelines, which support field staff working with child survivors in conflict and post-conflict settings. The package includes tools on conducting case management specific to child sexual abuse cases; implementing targeted psychosocial interventions for child survivors of sexual abuse; providing evidence-based mental health treatment proven effective in other populations; involving non-perpetrator family members in the child's healing and recovery; and meeting the specific health needs of child survivors.
- The IRC strategically decided to incorporate WPE staff into its emergency preparedness and response unit. The IRC has the capacity to respond to GBV in emergencies from the onset. Over the past 3 years, GBV experts have deployed, as part of the IRC's emergency response team, to South Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, Libya, Liberia, Niger, Ivory Coast, DRC, and most recently to countries affected by the Syria crisis, including northern Syria. As women and girls are part of the IRC's frontline response, WPE staff have already deployed to the Philippines to carry out assessments.

- Since 2011, IRC has trained 388 emergency responders working in NGOs, UN agencies, and local organizations across more than 25 countries to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and confidence to provide life-saving services to GBV survivors and reduce risks for women and girls in the first phase of emergency response. These trainings use an evidence-based capacity building package that addresses priority actions for both GBV emergency preparedness and response. Participants have gone on to lead GBV emergency response and coordination in the Horn of Africa, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Syria crisis. The capacity building package includes an online resource portal (the GBV Responders' Network - www.gbvresponders.org), making it accessible to everyone. All tools and resources have been shared with the wider humanitarian community at high-level events in Washington, D.C. and Brussels, targeting key GBV actors among NGOs, UN, and donors.
- Building on our GBV knowledge and experience internationally, the IRC is now piloting a GBV prevention and response program for immigrant and refugee women and girls served by IRC offices in the United States. Each year, thousands of women and girl survivors of violence from conflict-affected areas, such as the DRC or Somalia, arrive in the United States, where they need access to supportive services to heal and thrive. We are seeking to bridge the assistance gap to ensure that there is a continuum of services.

We thank and acknowledge the U.S. government for its investments in our programs. It is through funding from the State Department and USAID, that we have been able to pilot approaches, develop best practice, and harness our learning to produce IRC resources for the benefit of the wider humanitarian community, such as the *CCS* Guidelines, *the EASE* Guidelines, and the *EMAP* Resource Package. Further, we also acknowledge the support of American philanthropists through foundations such as The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, NoVo Foundation and Open Square Foundation.

III. The Scope of Gender-Based Violence

Violence against women and girls is defined as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.’ At its core, it is the violation of women’s basic human rights.

GBV is not confined to Haiti, the DRC or Syria; it is a global pandemic. The World Health Organization confirms that 35 percent of women globally experience sexual or physical assault in their lifetimes. That is, one in three women. Nearly half of all sexual assaults worldwide are against girls aged 15 and younger. Women aged 15-44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, car accidents, war and malaria, according to World Bank data.

Further, the statistics coming from conflict zones are staggering. Human Rights Watch estimates that in the Sierra Leone conflict, between 215,000 and 257,000 Sierra Leonean women and girls may have been subjected to sexual violence during the conflict period. Of a sample of Rwandan women surveyed in 1999, 39 percent reported being raped and 74 percent reported they knew that sexual violence had occurred during the 1994 genocide. A 2010 population-based survey in eastern DRC found that nearly 40 percent of women reported having experienced sexual violence and nearly 42 percent reported interpersonal violence.

The IRC’s work in service delivery at the grassroots level, paints an equally stark picture. From 2010 to mid 2013, the IRC alone received reports of over 23,000 new incidents in Burundi, DRC, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Iraq, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Uganda. This figure neither includes incidents that were reported to other state or non-governmental actors, nor incidents that went unreported because of lack of humanitarian access or because of survivors’ fear of reprisals and community stigma.

This figure speaks to the pervasiveness of GBV. Wherever the IRC establishes programs, survivors come forth to access services. Second, this figure warrants further analysis to understand, precisely, what is being reported. Through a database the IRC co-developed in collaboration with UN agencies, the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), the IRC is able to distill these figures and demonstrate that the forms of violence experienced by women and girls in the settings where the IRC operates, is not limited to sexual violence alone. The IRC sees cases of exploitation and abuse, early and forced child marriage, denial of access to resources, and intimate partner violence (oftentimes referred to as domestic violence.) In fact, in the IRC's experience, in addition to post-rape care services, women consistently approach the IRC in search of support to address intimate partner violence. In West Africa, over 60 percent of assault survivors whom the IRC assists are seeking help because of violence committed by an intimate partner.

The GBVIMS also tells us that 28 percent of survivors are children, 46 percent of those are abused by someone known to them (a neighbor, relative, friend, etc.) and incidents are most likely to occur in the survivor's or perpetrator's home.

There are several lessons therein:

- 1) The pervasiveness of GBV teaches us that we live in global society that enables violence against women and girls through implicit messages in media, national policies, and lack of support for the education, health care and other basic services for women and girls.
- 2) Except the few existing population-based surveys on GBV, statistics rarely represent a full picture of the scale and scope of the problem as survivors frequently suffer in silence due to community stigma or the lack of available services.
- 3) There is little need to gather prevalence rates before investing in the establishment of survivors. It is safe to assume that GBV is occurring in any context and services are needed, particularly in crisis settings.
- 4) Sexual violence and GBV are oftentimes conflated however sexual violence is just one form of GBV. An absence of reported incidents of sexual violence does not indicate an absence of GBV. Further, our experience shows us that all forms of GBV are pervasive and have debilitating effects on a woman's psychological health, wellbeing and overall functionality.
- 5) There can be no one-size-fits-all approaches. In all contexts, basic prevention work on changing norms to influence perpetrators of domestic violence may be effective. But in some contexts, such as the DRC, a heavy investment in security sector reform may also be needed as part of a larger, comprehensive solution.

IV. GBV Prevention and Response in Emergencies: A Lifesaving Matter

GBV prevention and response in times of emergencies must not be seen as optional but rather a lifesaving matter. Anecdotal and statistical evidence indicate that in fragile and conflict-affected states, violence is one of the most significant threats to women's safety and wellbeing. The risks of GBV that were already in existence before the onset of a crisis, be it natural or man-made, are aggravated by the distinct features that characterize crises – power vacuums, displacement, loss of livelihoods, overcrowded living conditions, breakdown of social networks, loss of traditional caretakers, lawlessness and opportunistic violence at the hands of armed groups, strangers, neighbors and even family members. In short, sexual and physical violence escalate because the upheaval that typically follows a crisis erodes the scant protections women and girls have even in times of stability. This is why when the Ivory Coast went through a wave of post-election violence in early 2011, IRC-supported service providers documented close to a 30 percent increase in the number of cases of intimate partner violence reported. This is why when the rebel militia M23 seized Rutshuru in eastern DRC in April and May of 2012, IRC service providers received a 24 percent and 75 percent increase, respectively, in sexual violence cases compared to the monthly averages during the previous 12 months.

GBV services are lifesaving because when a woman has been raped, she has just three days to access care to prevent the potential transmission of HIV, five days to prevent pregnancy, and sometimes just a few hours to ensure that life-threatening injuries do not become fatal. The failure to address medical conditions, such as vaginal or anal fistula, for example, will result in long-term health and social consequences.

While medical services are essential, they are not the only lifesaving aspect of emergency GBV interventions. Even with such services in place, the path for a survivor to reach them is blocked with the hurdles of stigma, shame, fear and real threats to her security. Furthermore, if the immediate and long-lasting psychological impact of violence remains unaddressed, they have the potential of severely debilitating a survivor's coping mechanisms and capacity to meet responsibilities, such as basic childcare and other household duties. Not meeting these responsibilities can often lead to further violence and economic penury. And so, the cycle of violence continues.

The IRC has learned that the most effective model to address GBV from the onset is to immediately establish services (even in the absence of prevalence data), train health and psychosocial providers, and establish networks that facilitate survivors' access to services between care providers. The services that providers should be prepared to deliver in an emergency are comprehensive case management and psychosocial support, clinical care for sexual assault, and specialized care for child survivors.

If specialized GBV programs are not established in the first days of an emergency, not only do survivors not receive support, but the daily risks faced by women and girls often go unnoticed. For example, in emergencies, women frequently face a trade-off of risking their safety to access the goods and services that aim to be lifesaving. They face threats and violence because of poorly designed and placed latrines and water points, insufficient and unsafe shelter, and badly implemented distributions of food and household items. Without GBV programs in place, too often these risks are not seen and therefore not mitigated. Violence and threats that may be more easily confronted at the outset, become more entrenched and difficult to tackle later on – for example, it is easier to ask women where to build a water point that is safe to access, than to build one and later find out that women are being attacked en route to it.

Because emergency response sets the stage for early recovery, a failure to address GBV in the beginning provides a poor foundation for women's resilience and health in the medium and longer term and is a barrier to reconstructing the lives and livelihoods of individuals, families and communities. If women and girls can take the first step toward recovery, they are in turn better able to support others.

While it is often thought that women's protection can wait, the reality is the reverse. Women's protection from GBV is most effective when addressed from the very beginning of a crisis.

Finally, we know that it is possible to improve and save the lives of GBV survivors through specialized services. We have clear evidence. A recent IRC/Johns Hopkins University impact evaluation in South Kivu demonstrated that rape survivors who benefited from Cognitive Processing Therapy – only 12 weeks of therapy – overcame crippling depression and anxiety, and were able to recover to the ability to complete simple daily tasks like cooking and taking care of children or themselves – tasks that define how women are treated in their households. These improvements remained constant six months after the intervention. An impact evaluation conducted by The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine on the IRC's pilot programs in Ivory Coast that informed the EMAP primary prevention intervention generated evidence that suggested improvements regarding: reductions in physical and sexual IPV; increased use of behavioral modification skills; and increased involvement of men in household tasks typically undertaken by women. This is most notable because these interventions were carried out during the post-election violence that engulfed Ivory Coast.

V. Relief to Development Continuum

In comparison to the last decade, international donors and relief agencies have substantially increased their engagement in and commitment to GBV prevention and response. One critical area that still requires concerted attention is ensuring a continuum of prevention and response work from the pre-crisis to the post-crisis phases.

The international humanitarian community can feel frustrated by the seeming lack of progress when a new emergency arises and the same trends are seen – increased intimate partner violence, sexual assault, rape and sexual exploitation and abuse. However, without sustained engagement through the development spheres – to tackle *all* forms of GBV – we will continue to see this violence perpetrated because the root causes of GBV have not been addressed. To stop the cycle of violence, and reach foreign policy goals, the U.S. Government should consider the following:

- Addressing all forms of GBV (rather than sexual violence exclusively) is a holistic approach that will reinforce the work of grassroots leaders whose message to the communities where they work is that all forms of structural and physical violence directed at women and girls constitute human rights violations and stagnate progress. Ignoring other forms of GBV that are often shrouded in cultural justifications is, in effect, a message of tacit approval to the community.
- GBV prevention and response services save lives in pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict settings. Fleeting investments made during times of crisis, for example, will not produce sustainable results if programs close down the moment the relief community begins to transition to development. When the height of a crisis is over, women and girls are still subjected to violence and hence, medical interventions are still necessary, Safe Houses cannot close, economic support activities are still needed, and counseling is still critical. GBV is a social problem that must be addressed throughout the relief to development continuum in order to see change.
- GBV is related to women’s socioeconomic disadvantages and discrimination. To address the root causes, gender equality must be addressed. Challenging the underlying causes of—and misperceptions around—GBV is an immense undertaking, necessitating cooperation across multiple sectors. But increasing gender equality will benefit all sectors, including the economy and politics. Reframing GBV as a development issue, not just as a women's rights issue, will be central to encouraging large-scale programming focusing on prevention.
- Violence against women and girls is the most extreme manifestation of gender inequality, but gender inequality presents in myriad forms in the home, in the community, in the workforce and in the political and policy making forums that govern the lives of women and girls. Transformation is needed, whereby women and girls not only live a life free from violence, but are also empowered to fully engage personal, political, civic, social and economic opportunities across the contexts where we work.

Sexual violence continues to be a feature of war precisely because the same systems of oppression of women and girls remain in place. And stability will continue to be threatened as long as there is violence against women. By investing in women and girls and working to end violence against women and girls, we can contribute to the promotion of healthy communities, which in turn develop economies and good governance, which in turn consolidates peace and security. Ending violence is critical to reaching development goals. Until gender inequality and GBV are addressed, in their entirety, U.S. government funding will not be maximized to their fullest effectiveness, and foreign policy objectives of peace and security will remain unfulfilled.

V. U.S. Government Leadership and Investments

The U.S. government has made significant strides towards combating GBV in the policy arena. New initiatives and strategies, such as the *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally* and the *U.S. Government Action Plan on Children in Adversity*, are clear evidence that the Administration has prioritized the protection and empowerment of women and girls as a matter of U.S. foreign policy and national security.

Nevertheless, traction on the ground in emergency settings has been lacking. The U.S. Government strategies, as well as the policies of other donor government and multilateral organizations have mandated the protection of, and accountability to, women and girls in humanitarian settings. Further, internationally-

recognized standards and best practice guidance have provided a framework to which GBV practitioners and the larger humanitarian community should adhere. And yet, the humanitarian response to GBV has fallen far short of established standards for emergency response. An IRC review of GBV responses in four emergencies – Haiti, Pakistan, the Horn of Africa and the DRC – revealed that:

- GBV has not been prioritized as lifesaving in emergencies; For example, IRC found that following the droughts in Kenya, reports of sexual violence increased by 36 percent between February and May 2012 in Hagadera and Kambioos refugee camps, compared to the previous three months. At the same time, funding for GBV programming decreased by 50 percent.
- GBV programs are scarcely funded at the outset of emergencies; A recent Protection Funding Study Report commissioned by the Global Protection Cluster revealed that .39 percent – less than one percent – of all Humanitarian Appeal funding from 2007-2012 was allocated to GBV interventions.
- Coordination and leadership within the UN system needed to mobilize funding, attention and action on GBV is weak. Coordination mechanisms and guidance exist, yet staffing and funding constraints prevent them from having a major impact on practice in the field.
- There is no clear consensus between donors, UN agencies and implementing organizations about what GBV needs should be prioritized during an emergency, what prioritization looks like, and what the best way of funding GBV program is.

The U.S. Government has demonstrated its concern with this panorama and is assuming leadership to take corrective actions. In September 2013, the State Department announced a joint initiative with USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, SAFE FROM THE START (SFS). This initiative is meant to be a roadmap for the U.S. to take leadership in ensuring transformational change in the way donors, UN agencies and INGOs prioritize and operationalize GBV prevention and response efforts in humanitarian action, from the *onset* of an emergency. SFS' overall goal is to reduce the incidence of GBV and ensure quality services for survivors from the very onset of emergencies through timely and effective humanitarian action. The State Department and USAID have communicated that they plan to achieve this by focusing on three key objectives:

1. Increase dedicated GBV interventions;
2. Mitigate risks of GBV across all humanitarian sectors and expand participation of women and girls.
3. Increasing accountability at the global level.

The IRC enthusiastically commends the U.S. Government for developing this initiative. SFS provides a framework that if followed through, will result in significant changes for women and girls in emergencies. Through its leadership and allocation of resources to address the existing barriers to effective GBV prevention and response in emergencies, the U.S. government has a real opportunity to effect change for women and girls in humanitarian settings.

VI. Recommendations: Operationalizing SAFE FROM THE START and related initiatives

SFS is an important opportunity. It is an initiative that has the potential to lead to more effective humanitarian action and hence the safety and resilience of those that are most adversely impacted by natural and man-made disasters – women and girls. Further, it is a *smart* investment; it will increase the impact of every humanitarian dollar spent, and help the U.S. government achieve its foreign policy and national security objectives.

Speaking on behalf of the IRC and the InterAction GBV Working Group which IRC co-chairs, we are encouraged with this new commitment, which clearly takes into account many of the concerns we have

shared with the U.S. government over the past years. We collectively look forward to learning more details about how SFS will be operationalized, and we extend an offer of a collaborative partnership to ensure that SFS achieves a maximum impact.

I take this opportunity before the Commission to also share a few concrete recommendations for the State Department and USAID's consideration:

1. Sustained Engagement

As PRM and OFDA delineate the SFS roadmap, we would appreciate the convening of U.S. Government – NGO Consultations to ensure that our lessons learned and best practices can be incorporated. The IRC, for example, underwent a process whereby the prevention and response to violence against women and girls was institutionalized, and are familiar with the internal and external barriers that must be overcome to keeping women and girls safe from the start. Moreover, we have decades of experience working with the UN agencies that SFS seeks to support and can offer critical insight.

2. Leverage Existing Resources

There is a wealth of resources that can be used to increase the capacity of UN and NGO humanitarian staff worldwide, as well as support practice in the fields. I have already shared with you today some of IRC's resources. Further, there are interagency guidelines and tools that have been developed in consultation with NGOs. The U.S. government can support the dissemination and use of these resources to ensure that the humanitarian community approaches GBV interventions from the same platform, and in compliance with ethical and safety guidelines. An investment in evaluating what does exist and how this supports results-based approaches to the protection of women and girls will improve overall program quality.

3. Human Resources Investments

Recognize that quality GBV programming is human resources intensive. This is a people problem that requires a people solution. Programs, if effectively staffed, can result in lasting social changes that will reap more equitable opportunities for women and girls. The U.S. Government can lead in encouraging donors to fund and humanitarian actors to implement programming that is already considered best practice, with appropriate staff levels.

4. Diversify Resources

It is important to consider the value-added of directly financing non-governmental organizations that are frontline responders, but who work in collaboration with UN agencies. In addition to the targeted UN agencies who will benefit from SFS resources, NGOs should be considered for financial support. This will allow the support base and capacity of all actors to grow and take on GBV from the start.

5. Leverage OFDA's potential impact

OFDA is a critical partner in humanitarian action. Today, the vast majority of the world's displaced are internally-displaced persons, rather than refugees. Being that OFDA has the U.S. mandate to provide lifesaving assistance to the internally-displaced, OFDA has the potential to influence the mitigation of risks in humanitarian action, and reach more survivors. OFDA should play a prominent role in the SFS roadmap and should invest resources concomitant with its mission and mandate.

Finally, the IRC recognizes that the U.S. Government has aligned its efforts with the UK-led Call to Action to ending violence against women and girls in emergencies, and may play a prominent role in seeing it come to fruition. We support the U.S. Government in doing so, and hope that State Department can help develop accountability benchmarks to ensure that the work of the Call to Action is effective and efficient.

VI. Closing Remarks

In closing, I would like to once again thank that Members of Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for inviting IRC to testify to the global threat of gender-based violence, and summarize my key points:

- GBV, in all its forms, is a grave human rights violation.

- GBV is more than sexual violence, and all acts of violence against women and girls require a multisectoral response.
- GBV prevalence data is not needed to act. We know that GBV is a global pandemic, and can safely assume that it is present everywhere and increases during an emergency.
- GBV prevention and response is lifesaving and possible in emergencies.
- Incorporating gender equality programming and GBV throughout the relief to development continuum is the only way to ensure that we make real progress in stamping out the beliefs and practices that lead to GBV.
- We support the U.S. Government in its new SAFE FROM THE START initiative and hope to collaborate in its roll-out.

Finally, we can keep up the momentum gained in the worldwide fight against gender-based violence by reintroducing and passing the International Violence Against Women Act. The IRC encourages the Members of the Commission to consider its swift passage.

Thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much. We will now hear from Ravi Kant. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF RAVI KANT

Mr. KANT. Chairperson and members of the commission, thank you for giving me the opportunity to report before the commission. I represent an organization called Shakti Vahini which works on various issues related to violence against women and children in India. We work very closely with law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, various government agencies, statutory agencies to combat violence against women and children. In the last ten years, Shakti Vahini has rescued more than 2,000 victims of human trafficking from various exploitative situations. Brutal rape and subsequent death of a 23 year old in a crowded area of Delhi, physical and mental torture of a minor housemaid by a highly qualified MNC employee, mysterious death of a tribal girl employed as a domestic help are all instances that have shocked and shook the public conscience in India and has led to massive outpouring of anger.

India, being a predominantly patriarchal society, has seen manifestations of violence against women in various forms. While some occur in broad daylight, some happen within the four walls of our houses nicely hidden in the pretense of morals and traditions. While India, a country where large section of people and almost all religions pray to goddesses, we have also high rates of violence against women in various forms. In India rape cases have been hushed up and not reported due to fear and stigma. The cases which are reported are very poorly investigated and many end up in acquittals. Further, a study of court judgments in rape cases by various courts undertaken by our organization in the last one year shows that law enforcement reaction by way of investigation into cases remains at best average and has called for improvement.

States in North India where the sex ratio is below the national average of 940 females per 1,000 males, are worst hit by the consequent problems. District level data indicates increase of case of violence against women. Experts working in the field of human rights observe that this decline in sex ratio has also shown itself in the growing commodification of daughters in the rigid communities of north India. These communities attach great importance to a woman and considered as a personification of familial honor. This may sound rosy and flattering at first brush, but this is a heavy burden to shoulder.

In the garb of saving family honor women have been subjected to ridiculous restrictions. Marriage traditionally in India has been arranged, agreed by families and within the caste. Women exercising the right to choice of marriage increasingly become targets of strong community opinions and violence. Many community groups or community panchayats have taken adverse decisions which have led to vitiation of the situation. They also propagate beliefs which curbs the independence of individual to make choices and lead them to resort to law enforcement for their protection. Even court protection has failed to save lives. Scenarios which make women and girls desperate for a better life lead to almost negligible options for them, adding to their insecurity and social stigma they are already being subjected to. This is in addition to the State's failure to provide timely justice to victim.

Human trafficking. Another grave form for violence and violation of rights of women and girls is trafficking, which occurs for various purposes like prostitution, forced marriages, labor, adoption and organ trade. Women without adequate property rights and their enforcement under various special laws are highly dependent on their male counterparts and thus more vulnerable to trafficking. In majority of cases where women end up in exploitative situations, they are lured with promise of marriage, better job opportunities and means of livelihood.

Trafficking in human beings, especially in women and children, has become a matter of grave concern in India. Trafficking is an organized crime which thrives on human misery. In India, despite strong steps being taken by the Government of India, the trafficking rackets and gangs have become more organized and expanded into newer forms of trafficking. The crime has expanded in such a way that almost every state is affected with this social and criminal menace.

Trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation is also on the increase. West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, these are the states, continue to be high source areas in trafficking for purpose of sexual exploitation. The missing girls and children data in these states continue to remain high. With the modernization of the commercial sexual exploitation of women and children for the purpose of prostitution, it has gone of change. The red light areas have continued to be prostitution dens, but the business has expanded out of the red light areas and has become much more organized by providing services on demand. The operators of sex trade have expanded their business and have started operating from various colonies and using the Internet technology.

North East India has also emerged as a high source area for trafficking of women and children. Girls from various northeastern states have been rescued from various destination states in northern India. There has been an increasing trend of women and children being trafficked from the eastern states for labor. The trafficking of children is being undertaken by illegal placement agencies. Many of these placement agencies are operating from Delhi and the National Capital Region. Many of these placement agencies are organized crime rackets specializing in women and child trafficking. They regularly change their addresses as well as the name of the firm to escape prosecution.

Due to the skewed sex ratio resulting from female feticide, there has been an increasing demand for marriageable age girls in the states of northern India which has been met by trafficking from the eastern states. Once the girls are lured into these false marriages and once they enter these forms of exploitation including false marriage, once they enter these false and forced marriages they are caught in an unending physical and mental trauma. Many rescued victims have narrated their tales of horror. Displaced from their culture and social background, which is vastly from those of those states, they become objects of exploitation for the men and their families. Generally addressed as *paro*, they are not addressed at par with the women of the receiving community and get cut off from all kinds of social ties.

The Government of India has taken steps to strengthen the law enforcement responses on crime against women and children by bringing in legislation for protection of women and children. After the massive protest which happened after the unfortunate Delhi gang rape in December, the police across the country have notified various procedures to be followed by the law enforcement in investigation, evidence collection, medical examination and trauma support to victims. The Criminal Amendment Act 2013 has strengthened the law on rape and has also brought in new provisions related to stalking, voyeurism and acid attacks.

The Government of India has ratified the U.N. Protocol on Trafficking, thus acknowledging the organized nature of this crime. In 2013, the Government of India has amended Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code by defining human trafficking and bringing in very strict punishments for human trafficking. The government has brought various schemes like the Integrated Child Protection Schemes, the Anti Human Trafficking Units, Victim Compensation scheme. Also the Government of India has created fast track courts for trials related to sexual offenses. Training and sensitization of law enforcement agencies have been taken up by the various police training academies and Bureau of Police Research and Development.

In order to have an effect of the new legislations, we have to undertake massive training and sensitization program for the law enforcement agencies on implementation of legislation related to violence against women. We also have to change the mindsets of our law enforcement agencies including police, prosecutors and lower judiciary, which is very important so that they understand the sensitivity involved in issues related to violence against women. This is very important as almost 80 percent of our police stations are spread across the rural areas away from the glare of the media and social

organization. There is an urgent need of reviewing the course curriculum of our law enforcement agencies so that the issues related to violence against women can be prioritized.

Each and every crime as well as the efforts to combat it has to come from within the society and calls for rapid changes in the perception, mentality and general conscience of the public and the State. Though the national media and the vernacular media has been highlighting the crimes of violence against women, the government needs to find out ways we can in greater awareness and sensitivity on issues related to violence against women among the masses.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to bring to your kind notice that your law on human trafficking has created incredible efforts across the world and that similar law on violence against women is needed. I can say so that this law on trafficking has created an impact in our police training programs, in our sensitization of judiciary and lot of things with the support of the United States Government. A similar law on ending violence against women will have a focus on violence against women across the world. Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Kant follows:]

Statement of Ravi Kant

Violence against women in India

Shakti Vahini has worked on various issues related to violence against women and children in India. It has focussed on combatting Human Trafficking, Slavery, Child Labour, Honour Killings, Female Foeticide etc. Shakti Vahini has been involved in training and sensitization of law enforcement agencies across India. It has filed Public Interest litigations in the various High Courts and Supreme Court to bring about changes in various policies related to violence against women and children. Shakti Vahini works very closely with law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, police, government agencies, statutory agencies to combat violence against women and children. In the last ten years Shakti Vahini has rescued more than 2000 victims of human trafficking from various exploitative situations.

Brutal rape and subsequent death of a 23-year old in a crowded area of Delhi, physical and mental torture of a minor housemaid by a highly qualified MNC employee, mysterious death of a tribal girl employed as a domestic help are all instances that have shocked and shook the public conscience in India and has led to massive outpouring of anger.

India being a predominantly patriarchal society has seen manifestations of violence against women in various forms. While some occur in broad daylight, some happen within the four walls of our houses nicely hidden behind the pretence of morals and traditions. While India is a country where a large section of people and almost all religions pray to “goddesses”, we have also high rates of violence against women in various forms.

In India rape cases have been hushed up and not reported due to fear and stigma. The cases which are reported are very poorly investigated and many end up in acquittals. Further, a study of court judgments in rape cases by various courts undertaken by Shakti Vahini in the last one year shows that law enforcement reaction by way of investigations into cases remains at best average and large scope for improvements. Many accused go scot free due to “hostile” witnesses and “insufficient evidence”. Miniscule rate of convictions in rape cases is a reflection of these factors.

States in Northern India where the sex ratio is below the national average¹ of 940 females per 1000 males², are areas worst hit by the consequent problems. District level data indicate increase of cases of violence against women. Experts working in the field of women’s rights observe that this decline in sex ratio has also shown itself in the growing commodification of “daughters” in the rigid communities of north India. These communities attach great importance to a woman and consider her as personification of familial honour. This may sound rosy or flattering at first brush but this is a heavy burden to shoulder. In the garb of saving family honour women have been subjected to ridiculous

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_states_and_territories_ranking_by_sex_ratio, figures as per 2011 census.

² <http://www.mapsofindia.com/census2011/female-sex-ratio.html>

restrictions. Marriage traditionally in India has been arranged , agreed by families and within the caste. Women exercising the right to choice of marriage increasingly have become targets of strong community opinion and violence. Many community groups or community panchayats have taken adverse decisions which has led to vitiation of the situation. They also propagate beliefs which curb the independence of the individuals to make choices and lead them to resort to law enforcement for their protection. Even court protection has failed to save lives.

Scenarios which make women and girls desperate for a better life lead to almost negligible options for them adding to their insecurities and social stigma they are already being subjected to. This is in addition to the State's failure to provide timely justice to victims . The underlining point then becomes the social attitudes and inactiveness that the society adopts..

Human Trafficking In India³

Another grave form of violence and violation of rights of women and girls is trafficking which occurs for various purposes like prostitution, forced marriages, labour, adoption and organ trade. Women without adequate property rights and their enforcement under various special laws are highly dependent on their male counterparts and thus more vulnerable to trafficking. In a majority of cases where women end up in exploitative situations, they are lured with promises of marriage, better job opportunities and means of livelihood.

Trafficking in human beings, especially in women and children, has become a matter of grave concern in India. Trafficking is an organised crime which thrives on human misery. In India despite strong steps taken by the Government of India the trafficking rackets and gangs have become more organised and expanded into newer forms of trafficking. The crime has expanded in such a way that today almost every state is affected with this social and criminal menace. Though trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation continues to be an area of concern there has been lately increased trafficking of children and women for forced labour, bondage and slavery.

Trafficking for Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation is on the increase. West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Orissa continue to be the high source areas in India for the purpose of trafficking to the red light areas across India. The missing children/girls data in these states continue to be very high. With modernization the commercial sexual exploitation of women and children for the purpose of prostitution has undergone a change. The red right areas have continued to be prostitution dens but the business has expanded out of the red light areas and has become much more organised by providing services on demand. The operators of the sex trade have expanded their business and have started operating from residential colonies , market places , malls etc.

³ [Current Status of Victim Service Providers and Criminal Justice Actors in India on anti human trafficking](#)- UNODC (Ravi Kant)

in the garb of friendship club , escort services , massage parlours, spa , dance bars, beer bars etc. This has helped the traffickers to earn maximum money and also get access to high paying customers. They have even started advertising their services in the newspapers and internet. Deals are fixed on the phone itself and transactions happen through the internet. Such agencies have mushroomed across the country and even though there has been a lot of police action through the Anti Human Trafficking Units (AHTU) the business continues to expand.

North East India has also emerged as a high source area for trafficking of women and children. Girls from Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram have been rescued from various trafficking rackets from Goa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka⁴. West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra continued to remain high source areas for trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation.

Trafficking for Forced Labour (Domestic Help and Maids)

There has been an increasing trend of women/children being trafficked from the states of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Assam, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh for the purpose of labour. The trafficking of children is being undertaken by illegal placement agencies. Many of these placement agencies are operating from Delhi and the NCR (National Capital Region). These placement agencies are earning huge profits by bringing in children from these states.

The modus operandi of the placement agencies is to recruit girls from far flung tribal villages by luring them with the promise of getting jobs. Once these girls reach the capital they are traded off to prospective employers who pay an advance of Rs.30000 (USD 566) to Rs.45000 (USD 849) plus Rs.10000 (USD 189) to Rs.15000 (USD 283) as placement agency charges. Once the money has been paid, the custody of the children is given to the employers. The girls have to work 10-14 hours daily without any salaries or holidays. The advance money taken by the placement agencies never reaches the family of the child. After sometime these children become bonded and they are forced to work. Many such children have reported physical and sexual abuse, torture and violence. It is only when information reaches the police about their conditions, that the rescue takes place.

Many of these placement agencies are organized crime rackets specialising in women and child trafficking. They regularly change their addresses as well as the name of the firm to escape prosecution. These agencies also have very strong network in the source areas. They threaten the parents and prevent them from lodging complaints. Investigation have proved that these agencies have been involved in trafficking of thousands of children and are also responsible for the missing children figure in the state.

Trafficking for Forced Marriages

⁴ <http://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=17..030712,jul12> - accessed on 14.08.2012

Due to the skewed sex ratio resulting from female foeticide there has been a increasing demand for marriageable age girls in the states o northern India including Haryana , Western Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan. This has led to a trend of trafficking of girls/ women from states like West Bengal , Assam, Orissa and Jharkhand. Due to backbreaking poverty families are lured to send their daughters to distant places where these women and girls are exploited and forced into various forms of exploitation including forced marriages. Once they enter this false and forced marriage they are caught in an unending mental and physical trauma. Many rescued victims have narrated their tales of horror. Displaced from their culture and social background which is vastly different from those of these states they become objects of exploitation for the men and their families who have paid a price for these so called “brides”. Generally, [addressed as “paro”](#) they are not treated at par with the women of the receiving community and get cut off from all kinds of social ties. Most are untraceable or exploited or duplicated as domestic servants by the agents or men who marry/buy them.

Law Enforcement Responses:

The Government of India has been taking steps to strengthen the Law enforcement responses on crime against women and children by bringing in legislations for protection of women and children. Some of the legislations include the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, Sexual harassment at Work Place Act 2013 .

After the massive protest which happened after the unfortunate Delhi Gang Rape in December the police across the country have notified various procedures to be followed by law enforcement in investigation, evidence collection, medical examination and trauma support to victims. The Criminal Amendment Act 2013 has strengthened the law on rape and has also brought in new provisions related to stalking , voyeurism and acid attacks.

The Government of India has ratified the UN Protocol on Trafficking in 2012, thus acknowledging the organised nature of this crime. In 2013 the Government of India amended Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code by defining human trafficking and bringing in very strict punishment for human trafficking.

The Government has brought various schemes like the Integrated Child Protection Schemes , Anti Human Trafficking Units , Ujjwala Scheme for rehabilitation of trafficked victims, Victim Compensation scheme etc. which are really having an impact on combatting violence against women and children. Also the Government of India has created fast track court for trials related to sexual offences. Training and sensitization of law enforcement agencies has been taken up by the various Police Training academies and the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD).

The way forward:

In order to have an effect of the new legislations we have to undertake massive training and sensitization programmes for the law enforcement agencies on implementation of legislations related to violence against women. We also have to change the mindsets of our law enforcement agencies including police , prosecutors and lower judiciary which is very important so that they understand the sensitivities involved in issues related to violence against women. This is very important as almost 80% of our police stations are spread across rural areas away from the glare of media and social organizations. There is an urgent need of reviewing the course curriculum of our law enforcement agencies so that the issues related to violence against women can be prioritised and become part of their training.

Each and every crime as well as all the efforts to combat it has to come from within the society and calls for a rapid change in the perception, mentality and the general conscience of the public and the State. Though the national media and the vernacular media has been highlighting the crimes of violence against women the government needs to find out ways we can bring in greater awareness and sensitivities on issues related to violence against women among the masses.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much. And Ms. Guerda Constant, welcome. We are happy to have you here. It is a privilege.

STATEMENT OF GUERDA CONSTANT

Ms. CONSTANT. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, esteemed members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, ladies and gentlemen, it is a deep honor to represent the women of Haiti before you today. I give you my thanks to hearing my testimony.

My name is Guerda Lexima Constant and I serve as executive director of Fondasyon Limye Lavi, Light of Life Foundation. Since 1993, Limye Lavi has worked to comprehensively address the restavek system of child labor exploitation in Haiti. We work with marginalized, largely rural communities to engage in collaborative educational and community development activities that help to build over 1,000 families in 12 communities.

The restavek system consists of the practice of sending children from poor families to join households in larger cities. Families undertake this practice due to financial hardship, a lack of basic services and the promise of educational opportunities and a better life for their children. However, the families who host restavek children do not have the means to support them properly. An estimated three quarters of children exploited in the restavek system are girls.

Children in the restavek system are often reduced to sub-human status in the household in which they work, as well as in society as a whole. They suffer neglect and physical and psychological abuse. Restavek children work from before dawn to late into the evening, often for 14 hours or more, fetching water, hand washing clothes, carrying heavy loads, working in the fields, caring for smaller children and preparing meals.

Limye Lavi wants to break the silence surrounding the restavek system. We work closely with communities for several years.

I want to share a little bit about our efforts which will help shed light on the root causes of the restavek system. Our community model consists on of five parts. First, we facilitate open dialogue with communities to establish baseline information collection and engage in education on children rights. Next, we work with parents to reintegrate children into families and communities and provide accelerated education opportunities for children escaping the restavek system. In order to address the root causes of the restavek system, we work with communities to identify income-generation opportunities. Lastly, we establish child protection committees within communities and train community leaders on advocacy technique to facilitate long-term change.

Among global donors, the United States Government stands in a unique position to help integrate violence prevention strategies into all its agriculture and economic development programs. In this way, your government can demonstrate that gender-based violence is not a stand-alone issue. It is deeply woven into the fabric of every single foreign aid investment, whether public or private. This is an example that the U.S. Government can and must set for donors and implementing partners around the world.

There are three cost effective and immediate steps the United States Government could take to demonstrate its great foreign aid leadership in the world and assist the women and children of Haiti and all over the world in the process. Number one, support a new national protection plan for vulnerable children in Haiti. Following the January 2010 earthquake, over 100,000 children lost the protection of families in Haiti. Hundreds of thousands more children are at risk due to economy hardship and widespread insecurity.

Congresswoman Frederica Wilson has introduced a resolution on gender-based violence in Haiti which urges the U.S. Government to continue its support of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, National Parliament and grassroots organizations in implementing a new National Protection Plan for Vulnerable Children, as well as a law to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. The U.S. can play an important role in working with the Haitian Government as it establishes a legal framework to prevent and respond to violence and exploitation. In addition, development assistance and USAID experience in promoting rights-based development can be leveraged to support the efforts of the Haitian Government to bring this policy framework to life through concrete action.

Number two, invest in local organizations that are getting results. Community-based organization grow from the roots of society and are closest to the people. Haiti is like a lot of other countries where rural communities are neglected by the government. People in the countryside are not able to have political impact. To change the system in Haiti for the better, it is critical to work with community organizations. In many ways, these organizations fulfill the role of government outside of urban areas. These grassroots group have the most accurate knowledge of communities, yet they get the least support from outside actors. A small investment yields large returns.

Number three, pass International Violence Against Women Act. This battle against violence should not depend on the will of a single presidential administration. In order to see real results, it is critical that engagement by the U.S. and Haitian Government be consistent over the long term. I-VAWA ensures that the efforts of this administration to put into place an effective GBV strategy will become permanent. When women and children are free from violence, individuals, families, communities and entire countries are stronger and more secure.

Thank you. I look forward for answering your questions.

[The statement of Ms. Constant follows:]

**Testimony of Guerda Lexima Constant, Executive Director of Fondasyon Limyè Lavi, Haiti
November 21, 2013
To the Tom Lantos Commission on Human Rights
Written Testimony**

Mr. Chairman, esteemed members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, ladies and gentlemen, it is a deep honor to represent the women of Haiti before you today. I give you my heartfelt thanks for hearing my testimony today.

My name is Guerda Lexima Constant and I serve as Executive Director of Fondasyon Limyè Lavi (Light of Life Foundation). Since 1993, Limyè Lavi has worked to comprehensively address the restavèk system of child labor exploitation in Haiti. We work with marginalized, largely rural communities to engage in collaborative educational and community development activities that help to build strong families and communities.

The restavèk system consists of the widespread practice of sending children from poor, mostly rural, families to join households in larger towns and cities. Families undertake this practice due to financial hardship, a lack of basic services, and the promise of educational opportunities and a better life for their children. However, the families who host restavèk children typically don't have the means to support them properly. An estimated three quarters of children exploited in the restavèk system are girls.

Children in the restavèk system are often reduced to sub-human status in the household in which they work, as well as in society as a whole. They suffer neglect and physical and psychological abuse. Restavèk children work from before dawn to late into the evening, often for 14 hours or more, carrying out chores including fetching water, hand-washing clothes, carrying heavy loads, working in the fields, caring for smaller children, and preparing meals.

Limyè Lavi works to break the silence surrounding the restavèk system, which is deeply engrained in Haitian life and rarely addressed within communities. We engage in targeted work, accompanying communities for several years. I want to share a little bit about our approach, which will help shed light on the root causes of the restavèk system. Our community model consists of five parts. First, we facilitate "open dialogue" with communities to establishment baseline information collection and engage in education on children's rights. Next, we work with parents to reintegrate children into families and communities and provide accelerated educational opportunities for children escaping the restavèk system. In order to address the root causes of the restavèk system, we work with communities to find new and improved income-generation activities. Lastly, we establish child protection committees within communities and train community leaders on advocacy techniques to facilitate long-term change.

We take a holistic approach that yields demonstrable results. Working with children forced into labor means working with their parents, often a single mother. In addition, addressing the restavèk system requires understanding and responding to the economic roots of the problem. Families often don't have the

money to care for children and communities lack resources to meet the basic health and educational needs. Solutions start with recognizing the problem. This is where we begin. We facilitate “open dialogues” in communities to bring the problem out into the open and create awareness. Parents are able to make better decisions for their children when they have the knowledge and confidence to work collaboratively within communities to find alternative solutions to sending children into restavèk situations.

Once families bring children back into their homes and communities, we provide expedited educational opportunities that generate outcomes equivalent to many years of basic education in just two to three years.

In addition, Limyè Lavi works with rural communities to address the economic root causes of the restavèk system. We work with small-scale farmers to increase agricultural production through new techniques and technologies and facilitate access to financial and money management skills and tools.

In order to precipitate change beyond just the communities where Limyè Lavi works intensively, we provide training for grassroots leaders to engage in advocacy at various levels. In addition, Limyè Lavi leads a national network of over 25 organizations called “Down With Child Servitude” and generates awareness through monthly broadcasts on Haiti’s most popular radio station. We are able to do good work with limited resources, but our efforts require partnership and support from countries like the United States, that are ideally positioned to scale up this effective, community-based approach.

The United States government has already played an important role in preventing and responding to both poverty and gender-based violence around the world, and particularly in Haiti. This is evident in USAID’s more recent commitment to support local groups tackling gender-based violence and child protection issues. Limyè Lavi partners with a U.S. organization that receives State Department funding and has been a critical partner in our work.

Despite the long-term commitment that the U.S. government has shown to its Caribbean neighbor, certain U.S. policies have also had devastating ripple effects on Haiti’s economy, especially in rural areas. President Clinton himself made a brave acknowledgment that cheap U.S. subsidized rice has put massive numbers of Haitian farmers out of business, leading to an increased state of poverty and food insecurity.

While economic instability does not in and of itself create violence, it can increase the incidence and severity of violence against women and children. The U.S. government is now addressing these economic policies and actions, and that is a move in the right direction.

Among global donors, the United States government stands in a unique position to help integrate violence prevention strategies into all of its agriculture and economic development programs. In this way, your government can demonstrate that gender-based violence is not a stand-alone issue. It is deeply woven into the fabric of every single foreign aid investment, whether public or private. This is an example that the U.S. government can and must set for donors and implementing partners around the world.

There are three concrete, cost-effective, and immediate steps the United States government could take to demonstrate its great foreign aid leadership in the world and assist the women and children of Haiti and around the globe in the process.

1. Support a New National Protection Plan for Vulnerable Children

Following the January 2010 earthquake, over 100,000 children lost the protection of families in Haiti. Hundreds of thousands more children are rendered vulnerable due to economic hardship and widespread insecurity.

The U.S. House of Representatives this year passed a resolution on gender-based violence in Haiti. Congresswoman Frederica Wilson introduced the resolution, which urges the U.S. government to continue its support of Haiti’s Ministry of Women’s Affairs and National Parliament in implementing a new

National Protection Plan for Vulnerable Children, as well as a law to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls.

The U.S. can play an important role in working with the Haitian government as it establishes a legal framework to prevent and respond to violence and exploitation. In addition, development assistance and USAID's experience in promoting rights-based development can be leveraged to support the Haitian government's efforts to bring this policy framework to life through concrete action.

2. Invest in local organizations that are getting results

Community-based organizations grow from the roots of society and are closest to the people. Haiti is like a lot of other countries where rural communities are neglected by the government. People in the countryside are not able to have political impact. To change the system in Haiti for the better, it is critical to work with community organizations. In many ways, these organizations are fulfilling many of the roles of the government outside of urban areas. These grassroots groups have the best and most accurate perspectives on communities, yet they are under-resourced and get the least support from outside actors. A small investment yields large returns.

My organization, Limyè Lavi, and many of our partner organizations have achieved extraordinary results in changing people's behavior and getting restavèk children back into families. We reach hundreds of people and get demonstrable results at much less cost than other organizations. We work with communities in a collaborative way, spending a lot of time in villages, living with the people, and learning about their problems from their perspective. The communities themselves work through a process of dialogue and awareness-building to find the solutions. Not only does that lead to sustainable change, it is an inexpensive method. Supporting local organizations throughout Haiti is key to creating real solutions and generating social and economic progress.

3. Pass the International Violence Against Women Act

This battle against violence should not depend on the will of a single presidential administration. In order to see real results, it is critical that engagement by the U.S. and Haitian governments be consistent over the long-term. IVAWA ensures that the efforts of this administration to put into place an effective GBV strategy will become permanent.

When women and children are free from violence, individuals, families, communities, and entire countries are stronger and more secure.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, thank you very much. I want to thank all of you for excellent testimonies and for bringing attention to an issue that quite frankly deserves a lot more attention. And I think this hearing has done a lot to focus not only members of this commission but also members of the Administration on the importance of moving forward.

I have a few questions and whoever feels like they want to answer them can answer them, all right, rather than me pick on individuals one by one. If you have something to say I would appreciate it. But let me begin. I began this hearing by talking about these photographs that you see and that were on display in the Rayburn foyer. This is an exhibit on Congolese girls in a place like eastern Congo fraught by war.

What can we do to help girls like those we saw, achieve their potential? Because I think this is a big part of this. How can we do more to help them in the context of war and displacement?

Ms. VIGAUD-WALSH. I will start. Thank you, Chairman. I think the first step is projects like these that help girls understand the agency, the potential that they have and envision their futures post conflict. That is critical to building self esteem and understanding the power that they have and tapping into their resilience. We work with adolescent girls in most of the countries where we work, and we have developed a program model for working with girls to develop their social human capital, with parents to understand the specific needs of adolescent girls that have survived violence and also with caregivers, with service providers. The needs that girls have are quite different from women and one needs to be attuned to that. Thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. Ms. Finch, you, in your testimony, you said it is critical to note that regardless of whether abuses against women are committed by state or nonstate actors that the state is obliged to condemn, prevent and punish all acts of violence against women. In the work that you do with Amnesty International, what have you found to pose the biggest challenges to foreign states holding nonstate actors such as employers and partners and husbands, families, friends and community members responsible for violations of gender-based violence?

Ms. FINCH. Thank you, Chairman, for that question. I think it is a combination of several factors. So discriminatory laws and policies that discriminate against women and girls, lack of rule of law in many countries. So many countries do have legal framework for accountability, but unfortunately there are corrupt police officials or inadequate judicial systems, et cetera. And then also there is a global culture of discrimination that devalues the lives of women and girls, so norm changing as well, and really working with both women and girls and men and boys to ensure that gender-based violence against men and boys and women and girls stops.

Mr. McGOVERN. Mr. Kant, it has been nearly one year since the gang rape of a young woman in Delhi, and sexual violence in India continues to make global headlines. Some reports indicate that cases of rape have even increased since that infamous case.

Can you tell us how NGOs in India are helping to raise awareness about gender-based violence and creating change?

Mr. KANT. Well, sir, actually the increased media attention and the increased government sensitivities to these cases and the more people are talking about these cases. More and more women and girls are coming out and registering their cases. There was nonregistration of cases, now lot of them are now coming out and speaking and registering their cases. So this a big step for us, in fact, with the increased sensitivities in the police and the administration. And it is going to increase because people who are not reporting are going to report.

Apart from that, organizations like us are creating, are discussing it in schools, colleges, universities, reaching out to adolescent girls in the rural areas, talking to them, making them understand about the different laws which are there to protect them, and also involving the local police authorities with the communities. So that the distance between the law enforcement agency is reducing. We are also trying to reach out to the rural areas to see that the discrimination between boys and girls are ending. We are also involving men in the fight against gender-based violence.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you. This is a question for everybody, but I will begin with Ms. Constant. Everybody has mentioned the U.S. role in combating gender-based violence and some of the initiatives that the U.S. has taken. You have talked about some of the funding the United States has provided your organization. I am just curious, on a country by country basis when you are in a country, obviously in Haiti, but for everybody, when you are doing work in a country monitoring gender-based violence, what is the relationship that you have with our embassies? I mean, are our embassies working with you to try to identify some of the most egregious examples of gender-based violence?

Are our embassies working with you to bring attention to the governments that are responsible for oversight that they need to do something? Is our foreign aid being used as a strong enough lever to be able to help influence things for the better? Let me begin with you. In Haiti, can you explain to me what the relationship you have between our U.S. people that are on the ground, not just in terms of the funding they provide but in terms of their advocacy?

[The following response was delivered through an interpreter.]

Ms. CONSTANT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Light of Life Foundation receives aid through the U.S. Government, yes. Thanks for that help. Thanks for that aid that we receive. A lot of children have been able to reintegrate their families. Many children have been able to get back their family and move away from the system of restavek. We are working 12 communities. We make sure that the women can sit down in the communities where we work so that they can sit down and debate the issues and reflect on the issues also with the men so they can try to find resolution on their own.

Thanks for the aid. We can help with new schools with a program of excellent education in communities where there are new schools. It is a very important support. What we would like is that the local organization that work in the rural communities, for the integration of these institutions that work in Haiti so they can contact, so they can work with these local organizations. Because they are integrated, they know quite well what the issues are. They can give advice. They can really give excellent advice so they can really give good orientation to help the aid that is being given.

Mr. McGOVERN. On this whole restavek issue that you talked about, how can the United States do a better job in ending child servitude in Haiti? We are providing a great deal of assistance to the Government of Haiti. Are we doing enough to pressure the government to cooperate with you and to end this terrible practice?

[The following response was delivered through an interpreter.]

Ms. CONSTANT. You can ask the Haitian Government through the aid that you are giving them to ensure that the children that are living in restavek situation, it is a very important point in the aid. Ensure that the violence against women and girls, it is an important issue when it comes to the aid. Because the issue of restavek has a great correlation with the reality of the women themselves. When women can take charge of their own future they can decide on their own. They can decide how many children they are going to have. They can make a choice of what they want to do. That will help very much in diminishing the number of children that are living in restavek.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you. Mr. Kant?

Mr. KANT. Chairman said, I think, the question about engagement of the embassies. We have a very active embassy, the U.S. embassy. It engages with lot of grassroot organization on gender-based violence, human trafficking. We have regular consultations. It also engages a lot with NGOs, and with the NGOs we also have engaged with the government.

Mr. McGovern. Right.

Mr. KANT. At the consulate level at different cities also there have been lot of consultation on gender-based violence. And now just within one month time we are going to have a consultation on the northeast of India to reorganize by the U.S. embassy.

Mr. McGOVERN. Ms. Vigaud-Walsh, when you are doing work on the ground, what is your analysis of –

Ms. VIGAUD-WALSH. I would say that it varies from context to context, greatly. It depends on the mission. There are countries where sustained engagement could be of more assistance to the humanitarian community, particularly in countries that are receiving significant U.S. Government contributions, to security sector reform to military. And in those countries where perhaps there are human rights abuses being

committed by security forces, there is a role there for the embassy to hold the government to account.

Mr. McGOVERN. Ms. Finch?

Ms. FINCH. Yes, I would just add to that also in regards to U.S. foreign aid being used more efficiently. We heard from the first panel about some of the very effective programs that are already in existence. For example, the 24-hour courts in Guatemala which have helped reduce rates of violence against women. And that is one reason that Amnesty International is recommending passage of the International Violence Against Women Act. It is a way to look at all of these programs, take a multi-sectorial approach and scale up what is working.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you. Let me just kind of close by asking you, is there anything that you think this commission ought to know that I haven't asked? In kind of summary, look, part of what we want to do is in addition to raise awareness we also want to compel action. We want to help make it so intolerable wherever gender-based violence exists that we could actually make progress in stopping it. And so some of it is funding, obviously, and we need to make sure that the funding is there, and is quite frankly a challenge in this Congress. I wish it wasn't.

But part of the reason why this is important, and lots of people are kind of watching these hearings on TV, part of the reason why this is important is because I think not everybody thinks about this issue every day. And in this government like in most governments, unless you are in our face sometimes important issues get neglected. So this is important and hopefully that will result in additional funding. But also better coordination, a more consistent response by our embassies across the country to be vocal on these issues and to work with human rights organizations to monitor gender-based violence regardless of whether the government is our friend or our foe, because sometimes we tend to look the other way when we have a strong military alliance with a country or a strong economic alliance with a particular country, but ought to be more consistent.

But I would leave this kind of last kind of question up to you as to what are your final words that you think that we ought to know?

Ms. FINCH. Congressman, thank you so much for asking that question and for the leadership of the commission. Again, I do think about this issue every day. It is one of the world's most prevalent human rights abuses, but it is not unsolvable. There are solutions. And what I would like Congress to know is that there have been some very good starts by the Administration, by Congress. As we have heard earlier, we have several new strategies -- the Strategy to End Gender-based Violence Globally, the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. Congress can take the next step by codifying both of those plans and making sure that gender-based violence, and ending gender-based violence is a top U.S. diplomatic and foreign assistance priority. This is

about making foreign aid more effective and scaling up what we know works. Thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you.

Ms. VIGAUD-WALSH. I would like to share that honestly I was a bit struck by the lack of discussion around services for survivors today. It is something that the United States Government does fund and there was reference to the need for prevalence data. And I think that we are now at a place where we know that we do not need statistics or prevalence data, incident rates and data to inform us of whether we need funding and programming to respond to the needs of gender-based violence survivors. It happens in every crisis. It is acute, and it needs to become a priority alongside other emergency interventions such as food, shelter and water.

Mr. McGOVERN. No, I think that is a good point. I mean, there is also kind of the added difficulty of responding to gender-based violence in conditions of war or displacement or refugee crises, but I take your words very seriously on that. So thank you.

Mr. Kant?

Mr. KANT. Sir, the United States Government should engage more with national governments. We have seen it work in the field of human trafficking, but in engagement with our national government has made lot of things to work. So this engagement needs to be strengthened and the U.S. Government should continue to have active interest in these issues.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Constant?

[The following response was delivered through an interpreter.]

Ms. CONSTANT. At the legislative level we have laws that protect children, but we also need to create new laws and to reinforce those that are already in the book. The U.S. Government could put more pressure on the Haitian Government so they can apply the law, so they can enforce the laws. We would like also to invest some more in the local organizations that bring about very good results and we have the proof already on the ground. We don't yet have a national plan for the protection of children, but we are working on that and we would like find support in order to get that to become a reality.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much. And I do think the United States in some cases could put more pressure on governments, but I think it is just as important, sometimes even more important for the United States to be supporting local organizations and initiatives designed to combat gender-based violence. I think we need to create

movements -- support movements, not create movements because the movements are already there. We ought to support the movements that are all over the world that are demanding that people who are guilty of gender-based violence are held accountable. I mean people need to be put in jail when they do these terrible things, and there needs to be accountability. And there needs to be education and awareness and sensitivity, training. There also needs to be services for those who are vulnerable, not just the victims but those who are potentially vulnerable. So I really appreciate all of your testimonies. I appreciate all the work that you do.

And I will close with saying that what we want to do is make sure that you feel comfortable picking up the phone or emailing this commission and giving us advice on things that we should be talking about. My colleague is championing the legislative initiative that we all want to see passed. It shouldn't be controversial, but sometimes these things are and we need to get over that and do the right thing. But I would invite you to contact us even if it is on an individual case. We want to support your work. And so I appreciate that.

And I just want to, before I close, acknowledge, I have been pointing out all these incredible photographs but I didn't point out the person who took them. So I want to thank Meredith Hutchinson for providing us with these, and I found them very, very moving. But if you haven't had a chance to look at them please do before you leave. But I want to thank the panel very much and look forward to working with you. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:30 p.m., the commission was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

Statement by Congressman David Cicilline (RI-D)

The Global Gender-Based Violence Threat

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Date: Wednesday, November 20, 2013

Time: 2:30 p.m.

I want to thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for convening this hearing on such an important issue.

Earlier this month, I traveled to Liberia with the United Nations (UN) Foundation, which marked my first visit to Africa. Liberia is slowly rebuilding after the instability of two successive civil wars in the past three decades. I had never before been confronted so intensely with evidence of the horrors of gender based violence. During my visit I saw many signs of recovery, but the country continues to struggle in many respects, especially in addressing sexual and gender based violence which is prevalent throughout the country.

During the civil wars, rape was common. One in three women were victims of sexual assault. And although there has been some increasing peace and prosperity since the end of the civil war in 2003, violence against women and girls remains widespread throughout the country.

On my first day of the trip, I visited the One Stop Centre at the Star of the Sea Health Centre in West Point, one of the largest slums in Monrovia, where high rates of teenage pregnancy and domestic violence have been recorded. This center is supported by various UN agencies and partners that tend to the medical and emotional needs of victims of rape and sexual violence with doctors, nurses and counselors on staff. Furthermore, the center enlists the support of the Liberian National Police who take down detailed reports of the assault and work with the prosecutors to convict perpetrators. What shocked me most was that this One Stop Centre has seen victims of rape as young as three-and-a-half years old and on an average sees four children a day that have been raped.

I also visited a UN program that works with impoverished young girls, teaching them skills such as basic hygiene and literacy training. I met some of the girls in this program, between the ages of nine and thirteen, who had been living on the streets and forced into prostitution. The young girls I met in the program were desperate to change their path. One young girl who is only thirteen years old told me she dreamed to be a doctor but her school fees were stolen by a family member, forcing her into prostitution. Unfortunately, this type of story is not uncommon. UNICEF reports that 13.6 percent of sexually active girls under 15 years of age in Liberia reported their first sexual experience as against their will. About 80 percent of adolescent girls are sexually active by 19 years of age. Only 11 percent of women ages 15-19 use any method of contraception. And the teenage

pregnancy rate is 31 percent. Sadly, cases of sexual assault are frequently underreported, so these numbers do not even reflect the full extent of the problem.

I found these figures and stories to be extremely disturbing. For the rest of my trip, I raised the issue with Members of the Liberian Congress and with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. I know that Liberia is working to improve these conditions and to address this issue through the training of more female police officers and by deploying more women and children protection police units to vulnerable populations. I am thankful for these and other efforts, and I encourage the Liberian government to appropriate as many resources as possible to address the issue of gender based violence. I would also like to see the U.S. Congress make every effort to address the incidence of gender based violence around the world.



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
The Global Gender-Based Violence Threat

Wednesday, November 20, 2013
2:30 PM – 4:30 PM
2175 Rayburn HOB

All around the world, women and girls are vulnerable to rape and other forms of physical and sexual violence - crimes collectively referred to as gender-based violence (GBV). According to the World Health Organization, 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced some form of GBV, with rates exceeding 70 percent in some countries. Such violence can significantly affect the ability of women and girls to participate in political, economic, and peace and security initiatives. Additionally, GBV exacts a tremendous human toll on nations and has implications for global diplomatic and humanitarian efforts around the world.

This hearing will explore the range of threats that women and girls face around the world. It will also examine the extent to which U.S. development and humanitarian assistance programs address the specific needs of GBV survivors in emergency, post-emergency, and development environments. This hearing will draw on the instructive experience of organizations working to combat GBV in India, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Haiti.

The following witnesses will testify:

Panel I:

- Catherine Russell, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, Department of State
- Carla Koppell, Chief Strategy Officer, USAID (Former Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment)

Panel II:

- Francisca Vigaud-Walsh, Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer, Women's Protection and Empowerment Unit, International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Ravi Kant, President of the Board of Directors, Shakti Vahini, New Delhi, India
- Cristina Finch, Managing Director, Women's Human Rights Program, Amnesty International USA
- Guerda Constant, Executive Director of Fondasyon Limyè Lavi, Haiti

If you have any questions, please contact the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission at 202-225-3599 or tlhrc@mail.house.gov.

James P. McGovern
Co-Chair, TLHRC

Frank R. Wolf
Co-Chair, TLHRC