

Statement on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls

Monday 25 November 2024

The 25th November marks the international day for ending violence against women and girls (VAWG.) The day is observed annually and begins a 16-day period to raise awareness of the global scourge of violence against women and girls. We are encouraged to take part in events, social media campaigns and educational activities that advocate for ending VAWG. This is an increasingly important issue, recognised by the WHO as a pandemic and now in the UK as a national emergency.¹

Globally, a third of women have been subjected to physical or sexual abuse.² Women and girls are particularly vulnerable in times of war and conflict; sexual violence is used as a weapon of war. An estimated 8 million women and girls in Ukraine are in need of humanitarian aid³. In Gaza, disproportionate numbers of women have been killed, while pregnant women face malnourishment and lack of access to essential healthcare^{4 5} Escalating restrictions on women living under the Taliban in Afghanistan include forbidding speaking in public to other women, singing, travel, study or work⁶. Ending VAWG involves challenging deeply rooted cultural attitudes. In the words of Gisele Pelicot, speaking recently in court in France about the horrific violations orchestrated by her husband; “shame must change sides.” This is a challenge which lies deeply at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching.

Pope Francis has spoken about VAWG on many occasions, issuing a call to all Catholics to use our power to bring about this cultural change.

¹ <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/vawg-is-a-national-emergency-say-police-chiefs/>

² <https://data.unwomen.org/global-database-on-violence-against-women>

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2024/02>

⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/sop/stories/challenges-being-woman-today-gaza>

⁵ <https://www.bmj.com/content/384/bmj.q625>

⁶ <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/south-asia/afghanistan-taliban-bans-women-voices-education-b2641453.html>

“It is our duty, the responsibility of each person, to give a voice to our voiceless sisters...It is necessary to act immediately, at all levels with determination, urgency and courage.”⁷

As Catholics, we are preparing for the Jubilee year as pilgrims of Hope. Let us enter these 16 days with that Hope, so that we can indeed act with determination, urgency and create a world that is safe for all women and girls.

The theme of the 16-day period this year is “Towards Beijing +30” as we approach the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a global policy framework for gender equality and women’s rights, adopted in 1995 at the 4th UN World Conference on Women. As Catholics, we can begin to answer the Holy Father’s call to action by taking part in the 16 days of action, with the help of this calendar. Please share it with your parish, along with the accompanying resources, and encourage them to participate in initiatives which will help support victims and survivors and bring us closer to a world where women and girls can live in safety.

If you feel unsafe at home or are worried about someone else, contact:

The National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247 www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk

Life Fear Free Helpline (Wales): 0808 8010 800 www.welshwomensaid.org.uk

Rape Crisis: 0808 5000 2222 www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Gallop: 0800 999 5428 www.galop.org.uk

***If you are concerned that you may be harming the people you love, contact Respect
Phoneline: 0808 8010 327 www.respectphoneline.org.uk***

You can find more ideas and information about how to help here

<https://www.unwomenuk.org/16-days-activism/>

www.caritaswestminster.org.uk/safe-in-faith

<https://dojustice.co.uk/resources/downloads/>

End Notes

National Board of Catholic Women

The National Board of Catholic Women brings together women from many different backgrounds. Working nationally and internationally to challenge discrimination and promote the right of women to gender justice. The Board actively promotes the presence, participation and responsibilities of Catholic women in the Church and society. The Board works ecumenically, with women of other faiths and secular groups. There are also many member organisations that bring their expertise, interests and networks to the wider Board. The Board is a consultative body to the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales

⁷ Pope Francis 27th October 2023

and the United Nations Social and Economic Committee (ECOSOC). In 2020, after many years of addressing VAWG issues as part of their other work, and responding to a growing need, the Board created a new committee to focus solely on issues relating to Violence Against Women and Girls to sit alongside their other key work areas. More information can be found on the NBCW website.

Caritas Social Action Network

Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) was established by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to develop the Church's social action in these parts of the United Kingdom, sharing in the mission of the Catholic Church where England and Wales can be places where every person is fulfilled in their families and communities, living with peace and human dignity. The small national team, based in London, seeks to animate and co-ordinate Catholic charitable activities, and to bring the voices of the poor and Catholic teaching to bear in guiding public policy. The network includes Catholic dioceses and professional organisations committed to the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Their work includes community and specialist support for families and children, the elderly, people who are homeless, refugees, the disabled, and prisoners. They draw on deep and lasting connections of volunteers and staff with their neighbourhoods. More information can be found on the CSAN website.