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Advancing the Status of Women Worldwide

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Distinguished guests, Dear Zonta officials, dear Zontians

Zonta's advocacy campaign "Zonta says NO to violence against women" unites the Zonta world in the global appeal to all Governments to end violence against women and girls once and for all. Today, the 25th of November, many activities will be initiated and conducted through the 16 days of activism.

Let me please start congratulating you for the great work and the fantastic efforts I am sure you are going to commit for the next 16 days. My thoughts are with you and with this letter I send you my passion for the eradication of violence against women and girls and for achieving a world of equality and mutual respect for all.

Violence against women is not a women's issue, but a societal issue. It is often rooted in misinterpretations of history, inadequate laws, culture and religion, but can also be based on social structures and traditional ideas of feminine and masculine identities. Violence against women is most frequently about power and control, and we know its consequences to women's physical, mental and reproductive health.

Founded in 1919, Zonta International works to advance the status of women worldwide through service and advocacy. And since Zonta International launched the ZISVAW (Zonta International Strategies to Eradicate Violence Against Women and Girls) program in 1996, more than US\$3 million has been provided to support 40 projects in more than 23 countries. Unfortunately, violence against women and girls still occurs in every village, in every city, in every county.

This biennium Zonta International calls on parents, educators, administrators, law and policy makers to address PREVENTION OF ROOT CAUSES THROUGH EDUCATION and to facilitate effective mechanisms that will ensure ERADICATION of VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN once and for all by

- Supporting PREVENTIVE programs promoting gender-equal norms and violence-free environments, and programs that help men to change behavior towards women to one of mutual respect.
- PROTECTION of women by providing One Stop Centers with medical/legal/social help for victims. Furthermore, promoting short term shelters and long term affordable housing for women and children, and supporting vocational training for victims to become self-supporting.
- PROSECUTION of the perpetrators through a) laws that clearly blame perpetrators, not victims; b) reporting systems and support to victims during legal processes; c) training of police and legal professionals to understand the issues.

We in Zonta believe that sustainable prevention requires an understanding of the root causes and the use of multiple complementary strategies operating on individual, relationship, and the community and society levels, starting early in life during childhood, continuing in the schools and continuing during adulthood.

Although I can not be with you today, please be sure that my thoughts are with you in this very important day. Let me please once more congratulate you for taking the initiative to launch the campaign of the 16 days of activism. I look forward to receiving images and reports of your activities and I wish you great success.

As Zontians, and with Conviction, Commitment and Courage, we will defend and preserve the right to equality and to a life free of violence for all and we encourage everyone present today to join us in this effort.

Warm regards,



Maria Jose Landeira Oestergaard
Zonta International & Zonta International Foundation President

