



Frequently Asked Questions about I-VAWA

1. What is the International Violence Against Women Act?

The International Violence Against Women Act (I-VAWA) is a piece of legislation that was introduced in both the 110th and 111th Congress that represents an unprecedented commitment by the United States Government (USG) to address and ultimately end violence against women and girls globally. It would, for the first time, create a comprehensive approach by the United States to fight violence against women and girls internationally and commit serious financial resources to the effort.

Specifically, the I-VAWA directs the USG to create a comprehensive, multisectoral 5-year strategy to reduce violence in at least 5 low- to middle-income countries that have severe levels of violence against women and girls. The bill also expands U.S. support and capacity for overseas non-governmental organizations—particularly women’s non-governmental organizations—working to end violence against women and girls in their own countries.

2. What exactly do you mean by violence against women and girls?

The United Nations Secretary General defines violence against women and girls as: “any act of gender-based violence against women or girls committed because of their gender that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” This means that the violence could occur in the family (battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence), within the general community (rape, sexual abuse in school or at work, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation/cutting and other traditional practices harmful to women), or it could be perpetrated or condoned by state agents.

3. Is violence against women and girls a major problem?

Violence against women is a worldwide human rights violation and a public health epidemic that knows no cultural, national or ethnic boundaries. At least one out of every three women in the world will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, according to the United Nations Development Fund for Women, now part of the UN Women entity. One billion women and girls are affected by such violence, including rape, domestic violence, acid burning, dowry deaths, so-called honor killings, human trafficking, female genital cutting and other harmful practices. In some countries, close to 70 percent of women report such violence, and in times of conflict mass rape is often used as a weapon of war.

4. How was the I-VAWA created?

The I-VAWA was initiated by a coalition of non-governmental organizations led by Futures Without Violence (formerly Family Violence Prevention Fund), Women Thrive

Worldwide and Amnesty International USA, in 2005 to increase USG efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls internationally. It is the result of extensive research on what works: It was drafted in consultation with more than 150 groups including U.S.-based NGOs, U.N. agencies and 40 women's groups across the globe.

In 2007 the coalition consulted with Vice President (then Senator) Joseph Biden (D-DE), Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) and Representative Howard Berman (D-CA) who introduced the legislation in the 110th Congress. I-VAWA was re-introduced in 111th Congress with strong bi-partisan support simultaneously in the Senate and the House of Representatives. The lead sponsors in the Senate and House were Senators John Kerry (D-MA), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Olympia Snowe (R-ME) and Susan Collins (R-ME) and Representatives Bill Delahunt (D-MA), Ted Poe (R-TX) and Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) respectively.

5. How will passing this legislation help women?

In many cases local women's organizations who have been working for years to assist women and girls affected by violence in their countries will finally get the help they deserve. Funding, programmatic support and capacity building will focus on both prevention, such as economic opportunity programs and public education campaigns to change attitudes, and intervention, such as health care for women who have been raped and who may become infected with HIV/AIDS.

In addition, funding will go to help change laws and cultural practices such as those that allow rape or forbid women from having their own money to feed themselves and their children. The I-VAWA also trains military and police forces to better respond to violence against women so that when women report violence they won't be ignored, laughed at or further victimized. Women and girls globally will also benefit from increased U.S. and world diplomatic attention as the problem of violence against women and girls moves from an invisible private suffering to a public issue that governments work to solve.

6. What about men and boys?

The legislation in no way prevents help or support from going to end violence against men and boys. Rather, the I-VAWA recognizes the desperate inequality that is still experienced by most of the world's women and girls and the violence that contributes to and results from that inequality. In much of the world, women and girls may still be raped and beaten with impunity and can be sold or given away to men. They can be killed for disobedience or appearing in public with a man who is not a relative or simply for being born a girl. Many cannot vote, own property or have any rights to their own children. It is this extreme level of violence and abuse women and girls experience *simply because of their gender* that the legislation seeks to address. Furthermore, the bill sites engaging men and boys as a key programmatic area to prevent gender-based violence.

7. How will I-VAWA affect U.S. foreign policy?

For the first time, U.S. diplomatic and development work will address this problem in a coordinated, integrated way. In addition, it requires that the USG act in a timely manner in cases of armed conflict where critical outbreaks of violence against women and girls, such as the mass rapes of women in Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo, are reported.

8. Isn't this the United States trying to impose its culture on other nations?

The I-VAWA does not try to impose the cultural morals of the United States on other countries; rather, it seeks to support the work of local indigenous women and communities who have long been advocating for an end to the violence and abuse experienced by women and girls. In addition, it recognizes that much of U.S. efforts to help countries address problems such as HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality, poverty and conflict are aided by addressing violence against women. In fact, these other efforts will only be successful if concurrent efforts to support women's education and empowerment are also taking place.

9. What is the difference between I-VAWA and the Violence Against Women Act

(VAWA)?

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is an existing U.S. law that addresses violence against women within the United States. The I-VAWA is a piece of pending legislation to address violence against women and girls in foreign countries.

10. How is violence against women related to human trafficking?

Trafficking of persons is a global human rights problem. Victims are trafficked into a range of forced labor situations including farm work, sweatshops, domestic servitude, and sexual exploitation. Violence against women and girls is one of the underlying issues that contributes to people's vulnerability to being trafficked, and many women face violence as they are trafficked.

However, many victims of human trafficking are men and boys trafficked for forced labor, so trafficking is distinct from violence against women and girls. In addition, the United States already has legislation to address human trafficking. The Trafficking Victims Protect Act was passed in 2000 and has been reauthorized since then to combat all forms of human trafficking.