

A global strategy:

# Women's voice

The Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights

I personally endorse the concerted efforts of the United Nations and its organs such as the UNHCR to elevate the promotion of human rights to a position of high priority on the international agenda. My government has pledged to sharpen its own national focus on this essential issue and measures are currently being undertaken to address the protection and promotion of human rights in our country. Among these are the decisions to accede to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to make a declaration under Article 41 thereof.

**H.E. Dr Cheddi B. Jagan**  
President  
Cooperative Republic  
of Guyana

■ Women want an end to violence against women. Violence against women should be declared a violation of women's human rights.

The World Conference on Human Rights should recognize women's right to be free from all gender-based violations and take action to help guarantee that right worldwide.

Rape, assault, female infanticide, sex tourism, dowry burning, genital mutilation, sexual slavery, compulsory heterosexuality, forced pregnancy, discrimination (in legal status, education, health care and poverty rights), and more... Gender-based violence is a universal phenomenon that takes many forms across culture, race and class.

Gender violence is often tolerated and even justified on historical or religious grounds, just as many nations once justified slavery. The international community should assert the universal value of women's human rights.

Slavery and torture have not yet been eliminated despite international efforts, and gender-based violence will not vanish overnight either, but it deserves the same international condemnation. The international

community should denounce all violations of women's human rights.

The UN should recognize and affirm women's rights as human rights whose violation requires immediate censure by all governments; assign reporting officials to survey women's rights violations worldwide and notify the UN of abuses; address women's human rights at every level of UN operations; and urge member nations to act to guarantee women's human rights by passing and enforcing appropriate legislation, by ratifying the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and by assessing the status of women's human rights in setting foreign policy and allocating foreign aid.

Women's rights are formally included in general human rights but crimes like torture, starvation, terrorism, humiliation, mutilation and even murder are routinely committed against women and girls, and *not* seen as crimes because the victims are female. The dominant image of a human rights abuse victim is a man behind bars, largely because the dominant image of the political actor is male.

No government now determines its policies towards other countries on the basis of their treatment of women, although foreign aid and trade decisions are said to be based on a country's human rights record.

Sexism is a life and death issue – for the half of the world that is female. Sexism kills: before birth (in the selective abortion of female fetuses), after it (in female infanticide), in childhood (in neglect of feeding and medical care for girls), in adulthood (in complications from genital mutilation, in illegal abortions, in beatings and rapes, and in dowry deaths and 'honor killings'), and in old age (abandonment, neglect and poverty).

The abuse of women is seen as a domestic practice, not something subject to outside intervention. The same question arose with regard to slavery and torture. Without international moral and political pressure, these abuses would be more widespread than they are.

The abuse of women is pervasive, and that's exactly why it must be dealt with at the UN level. After all, human rights has to mean women and men if it means anything.

*EXTRACT FROM: What do Women Want?  
Goals at the UN Human Rights Conference*

**A new awareness of women's rights will have a far-reaching effect on democracy and development**

