

Conference on violence against women Wrap-up (Montreal, October 22-24, 2006): Five Conditions to move forward

The first international conference *Violence Against Women*, organized by the Interdisciplinary Research Centre on Family Violence and Violence Against Women (CRI-VIFF) closed last October 24th in Montreal with a consensus among delegates about five conditions that are essential to put into place in order to eliminate violence against women in the world. This event also reaffirms the need to develop a network of international experts in the field. The CRI-VIFF is committed to promote exchange among experts to ensure that the network is built.

Let us be reminded that CRI-VIFF was created in the aftermath of the massacre at the École Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989, during which 14 young women were murdered. The CRI-VIFF constitutes an experience of real partnership among universities and institutional and community organizations. Its operational structure is based on parity between the partners in the academic milieu (Université de Montréal and Université Laval) and those in practice (Association québécoise d'établissements de santé et de services sociaux (AQESSS) and Relais-femmes).

During the Conference, exchanges between the 500 participants of more than 40 countries allowed for the identification of five conditions that must be put into place in order to consolidate and protect the already-existing social responses to violence against women. These conditions will also allow for new approaches to be considered and applied rapidly, because of the emergency of the situation. Here are some lessons learned during this first International Conference.

The first condition is to *reaffirm that violence against women exists*: it is a reality that touches the lives of one woman in three in the world. The many forms of violence occur at all ages and in different contexts. Indeed, women suffer from violence through rape during war, trafficking for prostitution, forced marriage, honour crimes (vitriolization, stoning, etc.), incest, through the multiple faces of violence against Native women, through particular forms of domestic violence experienced by elder or disabled women, etc. This condition will be necessary as long as States are not successful in providing a secure environment for women and one that is free from suffering.

Secondly, the experts confirmed that *it is essential that violence no longer be considered as an individual problem, but rather as a social problem*. The Conference allowed for the many social policies developed on this issue to be discussed. Some of them are specific (domestic violence, sexual aggressions, women trafficking), others more global (violence against women). Beyond these policies a constant effort should be made or maintained, for the message to be clear: violence against women is a social problem. A step in the right direction will have been made when society as a whole will be as ashamed as the victims themselves, of the fact that women are still victims of violence.

The third condition to eliminate violence against women is that *social responses be consistent*. During the Conference many presentations described innovative and efficient practices. Be it the process of search for help (victims and aggressors), criminal law success, beyond factors associated with success, two central elements were mentioned repeatedly as essential. Firstly, for social responses to be coherent, all actors directly concerned by the issue of violence against women (police, courts, health services, humanitarian aid organizations, child protection services, etc) have to adopt a common vision of the problem. Secondly, their actions should be concerted. More so, the security of victims should be central to all actions.

Among the actions identified, the delegates asserted that *an international awareness campaign* on violence against women is essential, as the fourth condition.

As the fifth condition and to allow for the others to be put forward, delegates demand that *funds be invested in areas where there are no funds, that funding be protected in areas where there are already funds, and that new funding be made available for new realities*.

Finally, let us mention that violence against women uses many weapons among which are words, fists and guns. Governments have the responsibility to control all weapons which threaten the lives of women, at all ages and in different contexts. Thus, the CRI-VIFF appeals to the Government of Canada to preserve the Canadian Gun Registry. This registry is an important tool to fight violence against women in Canada.

We hope to have succeeded in inspiring all actors concerned by this societal issue of violence against women, because we think that community mobilization will be central to the solutions to come.

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