

International Women's Day: Rights & Democracy salutes the courage of women's rights defenders

Montreal, March 6, 2009— On the occasion of International Women's Day, March 8, Rights & Democracy (International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development), salutes the courage of women's rights defenders throughout the world, particularly those working in conflict zones.

Every day, the most fundamental rights of women and girls are violated. That is why the issue of women's rights has been a priority for Rights & Democracy since its inception. In the coming year, a significant portion of our budget for programmes will be devoted to women's rights projects.

In Afghanistan, Rights & Democracy supports the process of family code reform and the use of marriage contracts. In order to ensure that women can participate fully in the transformation of their society, these initiatives are backed by a programme to raise awareness of women's rights under Islam, and another to support women's organizations.

In Haiti, our institution works to promote the representation of women within political parties and to ensure that their names are included on voters' lists. In Bolivia, we support the political participation of women locally by encouraging women's involvement in political life and by providing a training programme to female municipal councillors so that they can integrate a women's rights approach into municipal management.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, women and girls are victims of crimes of sexual violence such as rape, sexual slavery, mutilation and forced pregnancy. These crimes are violations of international humanitarian law and the perpetrators must be prosecuted for war crimes or crimes against humanity, according to the circumstances.

"Even more troubling is that usually this violence remains unpunished. Those who commit these crimes enjoy almost complete impunity," deploras Rémy M. Beauregard, President of Rights & Democracy.

Rights & Democracy supports and coordinates the work of the Coalition for Women's Human Rights in Conflict Situations. We also promote the right of women and girls to justice and reparation, emphasizing the importance of women's participation in reconstruction of the social fabric and the development of a just and equitable society.

Rights & Democracy also supports a continental network of indigenous women throughout the Americas and a project in Argentina, Colombia and Mexico, which enables women to present cases of double discrimination, due to their ethnic origin and their gender, before the courts. Rights & Democracy also backs the establishment of a virtual school where indigenous women define their own training needs.

In Burma, Rights & Democracy provides support to organizations that defend women's rights by encouraging the participation of Burmese women in democratic movements.

"All these projects have one point in common: they contribute to the development of women's capacities to ensure respect of their rights," stresses Anick Druelle, Senior Advisor, Women's Rights, at Rights & Democracy.

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