



## **For the end of violence against women: Defense of our Lives, Sexualities, Autonomies**

Autonomy over our lives, bodies sexualities will only become a reality for all of us with the end of violence against women. Violence against women is structural – it is an inherent feature of the patriarchal and capitalist systems – and is used as a tool of control of the lives, bodies and sexuality of women by individual men, groups of men, patriarchal institutions and States.

It is a tool of social disciplining that allows for capitalist expropriation of women's bodies and time, their labor and reproductive capacities. Violence against women is a subjugation, a conditioning relayed by all social structures. This is the reason why women, regardless of class, ethnic identity, caste or whether they are in the global north or south all women suffer violence. Because they are women.

All women are vulnerable to patriarchal violence, but it is women impoverished by the system, racialized women, women from colonized territories, women devastated by war or climatic disasters who as a collective suffer more intensely from trafficking, prostitution, pornography, sexual harassment and other forms of violence that commodify and objectify women's lives and bodies..

Violence against women and girls occurs in both private and public spheres. Whether in the private or family sphere, or the public sphere made up of our communities, workplaces or schools and other spaces, expressions of sexual, physical and psychological violence – femicide, the commodification of women's bodies, trafficking, prostitution, pornography, slavery, forced sterilization, lesbophobia, denial of the right to safe abortion and reproductive options and self-determination, etc. Are- added to the culture of silence, the blaming of victims, the culture of rape and pimping, discrimination, impunity, economic dependence and the internalization of oppression to naturalize, legitimize and aggravate violence against women.

Violence against women is used as a way of excluding women from the public sphere, limiting the free exercise of their economic and political rights. Women pay with their lives, physical and mental health, for working outside the home instead of staying within the private sphere as dictated by patriarchal culture, for going to school or university, for 'daring' to live their sexuality openly. In the context of criminalisation of social movements and of protest, repression against women activists engaged in the struggle often takes the form of sexual violence. This is systematically repeated in every place where women put their bodies on the line to stop the advance of transnational corporations over nature, vital territories and ways of life. Furthermore, discrimination against women is compounded by the intersection of different modes of oppression: they are discriminated against for being women, but also because of their skin colour, language, race, ethnicity, class (and financial situation), religion, sexuality, etc.

Violence against women is rooted in the patriarchal and capitalist system, which impose the need to control, to own, and to exploit women's bodies, lives and sexuality. Patriarchy is based on two principles: women belong to men (and for this reason, women are in the service of men and can never say "no" to them), and the division of women into categories: "saints" and "sinners". As part of this system, violence is a punishment for women who do



not fit the role of “saints” – of good mothers and wives. For example, it is common for men to justify verbally or physically attacking their wives because the food was not ready or the clothes they wanted to wear were not clean. It is also a punishment for those who are considered “sinners”, with both aggressors and societies justifying sexual violence against women on the basis that ‘they were out alone at night’, or ‘they are lesbians and need to be taught to be heterosexual’, or ‘the clothing they were wearing was indecent’. In other words, in patriarchy, women are considered as properties of men, to act according to the male advantage, as well as sexual object or commodity, to be used for men’s gratification anytime in every way they would demand, as constructed by patriarchal ideas of sexuality.

As part of the patriarchal culture, masculinity is associated with aggressiveness, and young men are taught that to be violent (and not to show emotions) is to be a ‘real man’, leading – in some cases – to them joining racist and sexist gangs. New forms of violence against young women, such as sexual harassment against female students and group violence in schools, are becoming more common and more visible each day, both online and offline. These forms of violence form the basis of sexist relationships and roles between young women and men, without any kind of public discussion around these devastating stereotypes. Pornography has crept into literature, it has contaminated fashion by sexualizing little girls from a very young age.

The idea imposed by patriarchy – of women as the property of men – includes an economic aspect that is expressed in the union of patriarchy with capitalism, imposing a sexual division of labour between women and men that separates and hierarchizes the work done by women and men, with ‘natural’ roles for women. In this way women are regarded as free labour in the reproductive sphere, always available for the care of others and all the work this entails. There are therefore two levels of domination of women that form the core of interweaving patriarchal and capitalist systems: on the one hand, women’s labour is exploited, and on the other, violence is used to maintain their domination by men. And therefore we cannot talk about the eradication of violence against women without calling for the eradication of the patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial systems.

Religious fundamentalism has been a function of patriarchy, intensifying the war against women throughout history. It uses various faiths to justify patriarchal stereotypes and puts the blame on women for all forms of sexual violence such as rape and prostitution. With the signing by the Indonesian President on January 2, 2023 of a new criminal code, women may be incarcerated for ‘sex’ outside of marriage, which can include sexual exploitation. In Afghanistan and other countries, women continue to be stoned to death for sex outside of marriage or for being victims of sexual violence, as religious fundamentalism reinforces the blame on women for male violence as well as patriarchal stereotypes. Burmese Buddhist security forces similarly committed rape against Rohingya women, to name just some of the atrocities by fundamentalists.

Violence against women and misogyny intensify as the policies and actors of neoliberal globalisation entrench their hold on the economy. Femicide<sup>1</sup> increases as free-trade agreements in the Americas are promoted and set in place (such as North American Free Trade Agreement under which work spaces, such as factories, enjoy lax human resource and

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<sup>1</sup> The misogynist, exceptionally brutal genocide of women, often accompanied by extreme sexual violence and impunity for its perpetrators.



environmental regulations): huge numbers of Mexican women are killed, for example, when they try to cross the United States border and within the border town of Ciudad Juarez itself. The women are also used as drug mules and considered collaterals by profiteers in the drug trade. The attack on reproductive rights and health services has been on the rise as social services are privatised or their budgets slashed. Younger and younger girls are trafficked as the sex industry is globalised. During the pandemic, the sexual abuse rose online as profiteers in the sex trade maximized their earnings, and male buyers continued to abuse women. Women are raped in wars waged in the name of ‘spreading freedom’, and colonizing powers increased the use of violence, such as the invasion of Kanaky by French military, of Palestine by Israel and allied powers, and many more.

Neo-liberal actors, including the pharmaceutical industry, profit from violence against women by normalizing prostitution and pornography, insisting that it is what women want. Evidence abound on how the medicalization of violence against women only sought to treat symptoms such as HIV-AIDS, but not to seek the elimination of prostitution, pornography and discrimination against LGBT.

We are currently talking about a crisis in the capitalist system, as the model of unlimited growth and accumulation shows its limits. We have characterized the crises of capitalism as cyclical and that the way the system resolves its crises is precisely by exerting more pressure on the territories and bodies of women. These pressures manifest themselves through wars that are very lucrative for transnational corporations, the demonization of women's rights gains and the increase of violence against women, the attempted appropriation of common goods and the conversion of these goods into commodities that are only available to those who can pay for them the dispossession of territories through militarization and the corruption of the governments that yield them to corporate powers not only as sources of “natural resources” necessary for “progress”, but also as a source of precarious workers and workers without rights both in their own territories and as migrants. In this context of capitalist crisis we see how violence against women increases, including trafficking, especially of women, adolescents and girls.

### **How can we fight violence against women?**

In recent years, in various parts of the world, women have had the ability to make visible the magnitude of the problem of violence, the social tolerance of femicides, the trafficking of women and girls to feed prostitution networks and child abuse. This has happened through the synchronized use of social networks to denounce the violence suffered, and also through massive mobilizations in the streets. This included the international #MeToo movement, the #BabaeAko (#IamWoman) in the Philippines, and many other country-level expressions. However, we have the challenge of making this capacity to denounce and mobilize grow towards feminist self-organization as a strong and permanent movement.

In many countries, there are laws on violence against women, and international conventions such as CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women) that “protect” women, but they are not sufficient because they are often not enforced or put into practice. Moreover, we need to make more visible the role of men in violence and denounce the fact that violence is structural.



In those countries where laws do exist, they rarely reach women who do not fall into the middle-class, urban, white category. We have to hold our States accountable, to demand public policies for comprehensive and survivor-centered services for violence survivors, for trafficked women and children, for minority groups (women of colour, of a certain religion, etc), rural, migrant and indigenous women. We recognize that punitive measures against perpetrators are necessary, but not sufficient, to eradicate violence. Reducing the fight against violence to punitive measures reinforces the racist dynamics of justice systems. Actions are needed to prevent and inhibit acts of violence before they occur.

We also need to discuss the role of governments and States. Nowadays, the State is simultaneously protector and oppressor, at the same time bearer of general interests and defender of privileges, but it is also patriarchal, racist and violent (against women, especially indigenous people, immigrants, people of colour<sup>2</sup>). Moreover, the very same police who enforce many of the policies we demand, are themselves perpetrators of violence against women, repressors of social movements, and are socially and racially biased. We recognise the contradiction inherent in this situation, because the fact is that for many women the only way they can defend themselves against violence in their communities and families is to rely on the State, which represents an external and superior power. On the contrary, the State that we demand is one that promotes freedoms and rights for *all*, intervenes in the economy, and is structured on diversified forms of participative democracy and controlled by its citizens.

Women have always resisted, and continue to resist, both individually and collectively. Whenever a woman acts in such a way that she defies or denounces violence against her or women in her community, she is breaking away from the dominant paradigm. We need to support her resistance by condemning and naming men who commit violence against women, and publicly confronting men and society on the issue of violence against women. We also need to denounce the complicity of men, the State and institutions such as the army and religious institutions. We need to mobilise civil society, strategise, and promote radical actions for the prevention and denouncement of male violence against women. In this process, the women's not-for-profit sector – that provides services that are essential to women's healing and empowerment – and strong, local movements – in which community women are protagonists – play a decisive role.

We, women of the World March of Women, want to engage in broad political debates and actions that promote changes in our patriarchal cultures and anticipate the occurrence of violence, in this way being truly preventative. The extent and intensity of male violence against women is already well documented, therefore it is not necessary to wait for yet another denouncement. More vital is to get this issue on the agenda of women's groups, mixed organisations, community radio programmes, newspapers, and other means of communication used by movements. In order for this to occur, we believe that the feminist movement should work towards the promotion of strong, wide-ranging self-organisation of

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the incarceration rate in state or federal US prisons or jails in 2007 for white men was 773 per 100,000, for black men 4,618 per 100,000, for Hispanic men 1,747 per 100,000. The rate for white women was 95 per 100,000, for black women 348 per 100,000, and for Hispanic women 146 per 100,000 (Sabol, William J., Couture, Heather, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Prison Inmates at Midyear 2007*, Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, 2008).



women struggling for autonomy (economic, sexual, reproductive, personal, etc.) and self-determination.

Women's groups are strengthened through group conversations, debates, demonstrations, and corporal self-defense classes.

We value, as an important step in this struggle, the fact that mixed social movements – be they urban or rural – are committing to confronting male violence against women. We acknowledge the importance of both women *and* men holding men accountable for violence against women. It is a triumph for us as a result of our work as a feminist movement to have taken these reflections to mixed social movements, from the countryside and the city. We acknowledge them for having raised our banner of struggle, understanding that we cannot advance against capitalism, racism, colonialism, the commodification of nature and the commons, the class struggle, if we do not advance in the liberation and emancipation of women. In recent years we have understood that patriarchy is part of a system of multiple oppressions that is interlocked and reproduced from all its components. But we continue to educate mixed movements.

We develop programs and strategies to assist women survivors of patriarchal violence as well as to mitigate economic dependency, exclusion from care systems and other pillars that sustain violence against women.

**In the fight against violence against women, we demand:**

- The adoption of measures that demonstrate different actors' full commitment to the recognition of women as individuals and citizens with full rights and full capacities, from childhood onwards. For example: the use of inclusive language in didactic material, the promotion of non-sexist education that abolishes traditional sexual and hierarchical role divisions between girls and boys, popular education campaigns and the guarantee of spaces for political and feminist participation;
- The financial support of women's movements and the women's not-for-profit sector, who are at the forefront of supporting survivors of discrimination, abuse and violence;
- The co-responsibility of the whole society in the eradication of patriarchal violence. this implies the commitment of the media, educational systems and cultural reproducers in the revision and in the necessary transformations so that they do not continue to reproduce and legitimize violence against women.
- The prevention of violence against women and girls through awareness-raising activities, making clear how it occurs, what its causes are, and how it manifests itself, as well as through the support and encouragement of women's auto-organisation;
- The condemnation of the systematic use of women's bodies as weapons of war in armed conflict, as well as the rejection they (and their children born of rape) face from families and communities, taking the blame for the extreme violence they have suffered;
  - We refuse that the women's body be used as an object men can buy. Women's body are not merchandise !



- We demand an end to the rape culture and the objectification of women's bodies that legitimizes and stimulates violence against women.
- The punishment of the perpetrators of violence – whether it be in the private or the public sphere, including states and big aggrupations – against women.
- As well as an end to the culture of silence and impunity that makes crimes invisible, minimizes them and even blames the victims for the violence they suffered because they are women.

**And we commit ourselves to:**

- Denounce the varied expressions of patriarchal violence against women in different countries, such as (but not limited to): femicide, genital mutilation, levirat-sororat<sup>3</sup>, 'honour killings', prostitution, pornography, trafficking of women and children, forced sterilisation, forced marriage, and violence perpetrated against female activists, women prisoners, lesbians and women with disabilities;
- Work to shift the stigma from women survivors towards male perpetrators of violence;
- Denounce the commodification of women's bodies;
- Make visible all forms of women's resistance – especially collective – to male violence against women, in this way breaking the culture of silence that surrounds this violence in our communities;
- Combat violence through awareness-raising actions together with allied social movements, and popular education campaigns that favour feminist consciousness-raising;
- Make visible the links between patriarchal policies that perpetuate violence against women (such as impunity for aggressors, denial of reproductive auto-determination, criminalisation of women activists, prohibition of abortion, etc) and neo-liberal actors and policies. To call attention to femicide, for example, and its links with free trade agreements;
- Work in alliance with mixed social movements (in which men *and* women participate) in order to guarantee the construction of an environment in which violence against women is not acceptable (and physical spaces free from violence) as a guiding principle of these movements.

**We want to change the lives of women,  
We want to change the world!**

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<sup>3</sup> The forced marriage of a widow to her brother-in-law or of a widower to his sister-in-law.