

International Women's Day Call: IFIs Must Stop Contributing to Violence Against Women

The theme of International Women's Day 2007 is Ending Impunity for Violence Against Women. Gender-blind International Financial Institution (IFI) operations—those of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the regional development banks—financing private-corporate led growth, debt repayment, and low inflation and public spending often aggravate existing discrimination against women and girls, particularly among marginalized groups such as indigenous peoples. **Such IFI investments intensify poverty, human displacement, trafficking in and violence against women, prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.**

The IFIs may not intend their investments to contribute to violence against women, but the impacts are all too real. For example, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)-funded Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline, supposedly designed to boost development, has degraded the environment, driven many women and girls in communities around the pipeline into prostitution, and increased sexually transmitted diseases, sexual harassment and violence against women. The East Asian financial crisis—brought on ten years ago largely by bad IMF advice designed to stimulate foreign investment—strained household gender relations, increasing domestic violence against women and girls, family abandonment by household heads, and female suicide.

Over the last 25 years harmful IMF-imposed policies designed to contain government deficits have slowed growth rates, amplified the gap between the rich and the poor, and increased poverty and unemployment in the developing world. The impacts on women and girls—who constitute 70% of the world's poor—have been disastrous. IMF agreements often impose caps on public spending, limiting governments' ability to provide essential services. Public health spending cutbacks increase the suffering of women and girls, who are forced to drop out of school and decrease their working hours to care for sick family members. Lack of education increases girls' likelihood of contracting HIV/AIDS. And despite World Bank and IMF rhetoric about the importance of spending on social services, the major increases in government spending on health and education necessary to lift women and girls out of poverty, combat HIV/AIDS, and meet the Millennium Development Goals are impossible under the tight fiscal and monetary policy framework required by the IMF.

The World Bank and regional development banks also impose harmful policies on developing countries that disproportionately impoverish women and girls. These include wage caps on teachers', doctors', and nurses' salaries; services and infrastructure privatization; and trade liberalization. Yet the World Bank's Operational Policy on Gender and Development that calls for all World Bank operations to promote gender equality does not apply to policy-based loans.

All the IFIs have committed to promote gender equality. The Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank all have strategies, policies or action plans to address gender issues. On March 7th, 2003, the leaders of the most prominent IFIs proclaimed, "We, the Heads of the Multilateral Development Banks/International Monetary Fund, affirm the importance of promoting gender equality and empowering women for achieving the Millennium Development Goals." They went on to say, "we affirm our continued commitment to promoting gender equality in our organizations and in the work of our organizations to assist member countries." **These commitments remain largely empty, or are negated by weak IFI safeguards against the negative impacts of risky investments.**

Harmful impacts on women may be unintentional, but in almost all cases they are reasonably foreseeable. We call for an open, independent, transparent audit of past loans and compensation where appropriate. So long as the IFIs continue operating, we insist that they stop attaching harmful policy prescriptions to their loans and meaningfully strengthen their safeguards to protect women and members of vulnerable groups. We demand that the IFIs without any gender policies or strategies—the IMF, EBRD, and European Investment Bank—develop them, and the IFIs with gender policies fully implement them.

Endorsements

Organizations:

1. Gender Action-USA
2. 50 Years Is Enough: U.S. Network for Global Economic Justice
3. Africa Action-USA
4. Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
5. BanglaPraxis-Bangladesh
6. Bank Information Center
7. Bina Desa-Indonesia
8. Bretton Woods Project-UK
9. Campagna per la Riforma della Banca Mondiale (CRBM)-Italy
10. Center for Environmental Public Advocacy/Friends of the Earth Slovakia
11. Center of Information and Development of Women (CIDEM)-Bolivia
12. Centre County Pennsylvania Chapter of the United Nations Association-USA
13. Centre for Organisation Research & Education (CORE)-India
14. Centro de Información y Servicios de Asesoría en Salud (CISAS)-Nicaragua
15. Comité Regional de Promoción de la Salud Comunitaria-Central America, Mexico and Dominican Republic
16. Daughters of Mumbi Global Resource Center-Kenya
17. DECA Equipo Pueblo-Mexico
18. EarthRights International
19. Economic Justice Project, Centre for Civil Society-University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban-South Africa
20. Emily Joy Sikazwe-Zambia
21. Engender-South Africa
22. FirstWorks International
23. Focus on the Global South-India
24. Focus on the Global South-Philippines
25. Focus on the Global South-Thailand
26. Friends of the Earth Bangladesh
27. Friends of the Earth Canada
28. Friends of the Earth International
29. Friends of the Earth US
30. Friends of the Earth-Nepal
31. Front Perempuan Indonesia Berdaulat
32. Fundacion Arcoiris-Mexico
33. Global AIDS Alliance-USA
34. Guatemala Human Rights Commission-USA
35. Halifax Initiative Coalition-Canada
36. Holy Cross International Justice Office, Notre Dame IN-USA
37. Iniciativas para el Desarrollo de la Mujer Oaxaqueña (IDEMO)-Mexico
38. International Coalition for Development Action-Belgium
39. International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation-USA
40. International Rivers Network-USA
41. International Women's Anthropology Conference
42. Jubilee Australia
43. Jubilee South/Americas
44. Jubilee USA Network
45. K.U.L.U.-Women and Development/Kvindernes U-Denmark
46. Land Center for Human Rights-Egypt
47. LOKOJ Institute-Bangladesh
48. Maasai Girls Education Fund
49. Medical Mission Sisters' Alliance for Justice
50. Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres (MAM)-Nicaragua
51. Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala-USA
52. Observatorio de la Deuda en la Globalización-Spain

53. Other Worlds collaborative-US/Mexico/South Africa
54. Pro Public-Nepal
55. Sisters of the Holy Cross-Notre Dame, IN, USA
56. Solidaritas Perempuan (Women Solidarity for Human Rights)-Indonesia
57. The Agency for Co-operation & Research in Development-Kenya
58. The Social Justice Committee-Canada
59. Tropico Verde-Guatemala
60. UK Gender and Development Network
61. VOICE-Bangladesh
62. WIDE - Globalising Gender Equality and Social Justice-Belgium
63. WOMANKIND Worldwide-UK
64. Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO)
65. World Development Movement-UK
66. Yonge Nawe Environmental Action Group/Friends of the Earth Swaziland
67. Zi Teng-sex workers organization in Hong Kong

Individuals:

1. Ahmed Swapan Mahmud, Executive Director, VOICE-Bangladesh
2. Ana Quirós Víquez-Nicaragua
3. Andrea De La Barrera Montppellier
4. Ann Oestreich IHM-Congregation Justice Coordinator, Sisters of the Holy Cross
5. Ann F. Hoffman, labor attorney and educator
6. Ashley Garrett, Regional Programme Coordinator, IOM-Thailand
7. Barbara Bramble
8. Barbara Lee Shaw
9. Bruce Rich, Director, International Program, Environmental Defense-USA
10. Caroline Hoisington, Sanibel, Florida-USA
11. Catherine Rowan, Bronx, NY-USA
12. Charles C. Langford, Associate Professor, Emeritus, Department of Sociology, Oregon State University-USA
13. Christianne Corbett
14. Daphne Wysham, co-director, Sustainable Energy & Economy Network
15. Delphine Kemneloum Djiraibe, N'djamena-Tchad
16. Dennis Brutus-South Africa
17. Dorothy "Dee" Gamble, Santa Fe, NM-USA
18. Elissa Parker
19. Elizabeth DuVerlie-USA
20. Emira Woods, Foreign Policy In Focus-USA
21. George Mullinax
22. Heather D. Switzer, Institute for Policy and Governance, The School for Public and International Affairs, Virginia Tech
23. Hemantha Withanage, Executive Director, NGO Forum on ADB
24. Irene Tinker
25. Jean L. Pyle, Professor Emerita, Department of Regional Economic and Social Development, University of Massachusetts Lowell-USA
26. Jeanne Koopman, Research Fellow, African Studies Center, Boston University-USA
27. Joanna Levitt, Director of Programs, International Accountability Project (IAP)-USA
28. Karine Grigoryan-Armenia
29. Kimberly Boyd
30. Kristen Timothy Lankester
31. Lee A. Kimball
32. Ma. Eugenia Mata
33. Madeline Riley, Physicians for Social Responsibility-USA
34. Magda Stoczkiwicz, Policy Coordinator, CEE Bankwatch Network
35. Manal Saleh, Senior Economic Researcher-Egypt
36. Margo Jackson Spencer

37. Maria Rebelo-Plaut
38. Mavic Cabrera-Balleza, World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) - Women's International Network-Canada
39. Mustafa Mujeri
40. Nadia Johnson, Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO)
41. Nadia Martinez, Co-Director, SEEN, Institute for Policy Studies-USA
42. Nina Klowden Herman-Canada
43. Nora Ferm, Director, Rights for Working Women Campaign International Labor Rights Fund-USA
44. Pat Krackov
45. Patrick Bond, Economic Justice Project of the Centre for Civil Society (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban-South Africa)
46. Renny Golden, Professor Emerita Northeastern Illinois University; Current adjunct professor University of New Mexico
47. Rita Feinberg-USA
48. Robert J. Berg, International Consultant
49. Roger Plaut
50. Romil Hernandez, Information & Communication Coordinator, NGO Forum on ADB
51. Sharon Altendorf
52. Sheelu, Tamilnadu Women's Collective
53. Smitu Kothari, Director, Intercultural Resources-India
54. Sr. Marie Elena Dio, Dominican Leadership Conference
55. Sundari, Tamilnadu Resource Team
56. Suzanne Doerge, Ottawa, Ontario-Canada
57. Ulrike Bey-Germany
58. Warisha Yunus, George Washington University-USA
59. Women for Change-Zambia