

# Frequently Asked Questions

## *About the White Ribbon Campaign*

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### **What is the White Ribbon Campaign?**

The White Ribbon Campaign (WRC) is the largest effort in the world of men working to end violence against women (VAW). In over fifty-five countries, campaigns are led by both men and women, even though the focus is on educating men and boys. In some countries it is a general public education effort focused on ending violence against women.



**WHITE RIBBON  
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### **How did the WRC get started?**

In 1991, a handful of men in Canada decided they had a responsibility to urge men to speak out about violence against women. Wearing a white ribbon would be a symbol of men's opposition to violence against women. With only six weeks of preparation, 100,000 men across Canada wore a white ribbon, while many others were drawn into discussion and debate.

### **What does it mean to wear a white ribbon?**

Wearing a white ribbon is a personal *pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls*. Wearing a white ribbon is a way of saying, "Our future has no violence against women."

### **What is the goal of the WRC? How is this accomplished?**

The main goal of WRC is ending violence against women in all its forms. We accomplish this in five ways:

- **Challenging** everyone to speak out, and think about their own beliefs, language and actions.
- **Educating** young people, especially young men and boys, on the issue through the educational resources we produce.
- **Raising public awareness** of the issue.
- **Working in partnership** with women's organizations, the corporate sector, the media and other partners to create a future with no violence against women.
- **Supporting White Ribbon Campaigns** around the world with our experience, resources and networks.

### **When is the focus of the White Ribbon Campaign?**

WRC in Canada runs its campaign from from November 25 (the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women) until December 6, Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Other countries support 16 Days of Action from November 25<sup>th</sup> until December 10<sup>th</sup> but campaigns can occur at any time of the year.

### **What forms of VAW concern you?**

The most widespread problems are physical violence against spouses and girlfriends (from hitting right up to murder) and sexual violence (usually committed by a boyfriend, husband, trusted adult, or family member.) There is also emotional abuse -- sexual harassment at work or on the street, stalking, jokes that demean women, and controlling behavior. In some countries

violence occurs in the form of genital mutilation of girls and trafficking of girls and young women into prostitution.

### **What about other forms of violence?**

Although ending men's violence against women is our focus, we are concerned about all forms of violence. We are deeply concerned about violence against children. We are concerned about violence among boys on the playground, in the sports arena, in relationships, and in war. And we are concerned by acts of violence by women against women or against men, although these are not as extensive nor as frequently lethal as men's violence against women.

Unlike violence by some women against men, violence committed by some men against women has long been socially acceptable and is deeply rooted in beliefs of men's superiority and of men's right to control the lives of "their" women.

### **Does this mean you think that men are bad? Are you anti-male?**

We do not think that men are naturally violent and we don't think that men are bad, however we do think all men have roles and responsibilities in ending violence against women. The majority of men are not physically violent. Researchers tell us many past cultures had little or no violence.

At the same time, we do think that some men have learned to express their anger or insecurity through violence. Far too many men have come to believe that violence against a woman, child or another man is an acceptable way to control another person, especially an intimate partner.

By remaining silent about these things, we allow other men to poison our work, schools and homes.

The good news is that more and more men and boys want to make a difference. Caring men are tired of the sexism that hurts the women around them. Caring men are also concerned with the impact of this violence on the lives of men and boys.

### **Do you have opinions on other issues of the day?**

Our goal is for all men and boys to get involved in a campaign devoted to creating a future without violence against women. Within the WRC there is a great diversity of opinion on many important issues, including ones relating to moral, religious and political beliefs. These issues are important, but they shouldn't prevent men from working together to stop domestic violence, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. And so we agree to hold diverse opinions. We include men from across the political spectrum from left to right, of all religions, ethnic and racial groups, and backgrounds.

### **Does everyone have to wear a white ribbon?**

Some campaigns use cloth ribbons or small white ribbon pins shaped into our distinctive logo. Others have the white ribbon logo printed on T-shirts or hats. Some use cloth or plastic wristbands. And some only use the logo on posters, pamphlets, or in TV ads.

### **Who starts local and national campaigns?**

The White Ribbon Campaign is unique in that it is a decentralized effort that believes that people know best what will most effectively reach men and boys in their community, school, workplace, and country. In that sense, anyone who believes in the goals and philosophy of the WRC can start a campaign. We encourage White Ribbon supporters in each country or community to work together. In some countries there is an official White Ribbon organization.

### **Are women part of White Ribbon? Do they wear the ribbon?**

In Canada, the WRC is primarily a campaign of men, aimed at boys and young men. But we have women on our board and on our staff. Many local campaigns are encouraged by women's groups, many are led by men and women together, and women participate in many, if not most, activities.

In some countries, campuses, and communities, White Ribbon is led exclusively by men. In others, it is a joint effort or even one where women are leading.

Although the ribbon started as a symbol of men's opposition to violence against women, in many schools and communities both males and females wear the ribbon. For men, it is a personal pledge, for women a show of support that men and boys have a role and responsibility in ending violence against women.

### **What are your relations with women's groups?**

We acknowledge the expertise and central role of women in challenging violence against women. With tremendous heroism, they pioneered this work; they set up support programs for women and pushed for social awareness and legal change. It is essential for our local groups to have an ongoing dialogue with women's groups in their community. Real progress will only be achieved in partnership with women's organizations.

### **Who runs the White Ribbon Campaign?**

In Canada we have a volunteer Board of Directors as well as a small but dedicated staff. Around the world, the WRC is led by many different organizations. The heart and soul of the organization are concerned men and women like you.

### **So what type of organization is it?**

It's an organization like no other. Not only does it include men and women from varying social and political perspectives, but it is an organization that has avoided becoming hierarchical or bureaucratic. We want to keep our emphasis on the community, on the schools and workplaces.

### **How are you funded?**

Although specific projects may be supported by the government, we do not receive any core funding support from any level of government. We rely solely on individual and corporate fundraising, events and project specific government funding.

We recognize that intervention and support services for women who experience violence are under-funded and under-resourced. Because of this, for most of our existence we refused to apply for government funding so as not to further strain these limited resources.

We now have a government funding policy which explicitly prohibits us from applying for support and intervention funding. We only apply for violence prevention funds in partnership with a women's organization, unless specifically invited.

### **Does this take money away from women's groups?**

We support women's programs by encouraging men to give generously to them and by encouraging schools and others to raise money. We believe that by contributing to the reduction of violence against women, we are contributing to the overstretched resources of women's services. And we believe that as more men see this as an important issue, funding will increase to women's organizations. As mentioned above, we will only accept funding for projects when partnered with a women's organization, unless specifically invited.

### **Do you provide grants or general financial support?**

Unfortunately, the WRC is not in the position to provide funding or grants for projects, organizations, or travel, or for establishing national or local White Ribbon Campaigns.

### **How can I help?**

We encourage you to support White Ribbon activities in your community, and we encourage you to help the WRC in Canada and around the world with your generous financial support.

#### **THE WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN**

**Our Future Has No Violence Against Women**

**365 Bloor Street East**

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#### **Visit our blog at:**

[ourfuturehasnoviolenceagainstwomen.blogspot.com](http://ourfuturehasnoviolenceagainstwomen.blogspot.com)

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# What Every Man Can Do

## *Our Future Has No Violence Against Women*

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### **1. LISTEN TO WOMEN... LEARN FROM WOMEN**

The path starts with listening.

Who knows better about violence against women than women who experience it? Around the world, as many as one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in some other way. Huge numbers experience sexual harassment in the workplace, at home or at school.

Learn about violence by asking a woman who trusts you how violence has affected her life. Then, if she feels comfortable to talk, sit back and listen. Your role isn't to challenge her on the details, nor debate whether something really should have bothered her or not. It is to listen. Simply trust that if she tells you something hurt her, then it did hurt her.

Turn to your local women's organizations. They have a wealth of accumulated experience and knowledge. Talk to them. Read their publications. Contribute financially. Learn from them.

### **2. LEARN ABOUT THE PROBLEM**

Violence against women includes physical and sexual assault, sexual harassment, and emotional abuse. Not all violence leaves visible scars. Emotional violence includes regular subjection to demeaning jokes, domineering forms of behaviour, and sexual harassment.

Some forms of violence have a greater physical or emotional impact than others. But all forms of violence contribute to the very real fear and suffering that women in our society endure. The basic rights that most men enjoy – safety in their homes, ability to go out at night, a job free of harassment – are a source of fear for women in much of the world.

Sometimes the fear is greatest in women's own homes. A common myth is that most violence is committed by strangers. The fact is, when a woman faces violence it is usually by a man she knows – her husband, boyfriend, father, or employer.

Most men love and care about women. Yet a frightening number commit acts of violence against the women they say they love. It occurs throughout the world, among the rich, poor, and middle class, and among those of every nationality, religion, and ethnicity. While not all men use violence - we believe all men have a role and responsibility in ending it!

### **3. LEARN WHY SOME MEN ARE VIOLENT**

Men are not naturally violent. Historically there have been societies with little or no violence. Even today, in many countries, the majority of men do not use sexual or physical violence.



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Violence is something that some men learn. Men's violence is a result of the way many men learn to express their masculinity in relationships with women, children, and other men. Many men learn to think of power as the ability to dominate and control the people and the world around them. This way of thinking makes the use of violence acceptable to many men.

Most individual acts of men's violence are an attempt to assert control over others. Paradoxically, most violent acts by men are a sign of weakness, insecurity, and lack of self-esteem combined with a capacity for physical or verbal domination and feeling that they should be superior and in control.

Some violent incidents by men can be linked to substance abuse. Using alcohol or drugs may unleash feelings, fears, rage, and insecurities that some men, cut off from their feelings cannot handle.

But substances don't cause violence. Genes don't cause violence. Ultimately, it is the attempt by some men to dominate women, or adults' attempts to dominate children, or some men's attempts to dominate other men or groups of men. Violence is a way of asserting power, privilege, and control. Violence is a way for compensating for feelings that you're not a "real man."

### **4. SUPPORT WHITE RIBBON EVENTS**

Change will occur if we each accept personal responsibility to make sure change happens. As men who care about the women in our lives, we can take steps to help ensure that women live free from fear and violence.

Each year, men around the world wear a white ribbon or take part in the events of White Ribbon Days. In many countries this is from November 25, the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women, until around December 10. In Canada, we wear the ribbon until December 6, the day of the 1989 massacre of 14 women in Montreal.

Wearing a white ribbon is your personal pledge to never commit violence against women. It is a personal pledge to not condone acts of violence, to not make excuses for those who use violence, and to not think that any woman "asks for it." It is a pledge to not remain silent. It is a pledge to challenge the men around us to act to end violence.

Wearing a ribbon encourages discussion, debate, and soul-searching among the men and boys around us. The ribbon is a catalyst for discussion. It is a catalyst for change.

Most importantly, the white ribbon is a positive statement that our future has no violence against women.

## **5. CHALLENGE SEXIST LANGUAGE AND JOKES THAT DEGRADE WOMEN**

Sexist jokes and language help create a climate where forms of violence and abuse have too long been accepted. Words that degrade women reflect a society that has historically placed women in a second class position. By reflecting this reality they once again put women “in their place” even if that isn’t the intention.

One of the most difficult things for men is to learn to engage with other men on this issue. To question sexist language. To speak up when men talk lightly of violence against women. To intervene with men who engage in violence.

## **6. LEARN TO IDENTIFY AND OPPOSE SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE IN YOUR WORKPLACE, SCHOOL, AND FAMILY**

Sexual harassment refers to unwanted sexual advances or sexually-oriented remarks or behaviours that are unwelcome by another person. Flirting and joking can be fine but only if they are consensual and wanted. Sexual harassment poisons the work or school environment. Men can join women in opposing sexual harassment by learning to spot it and learning to say something to stop it.

## **7. SUPPORT LOCAL WOMEN'S PROGRAMMES**

Around the world, dedicated women have created support services for women who are survivors of men’s violence: safe houses for battered women, rape crisis centres, counselling services, and legal aid clinics. Women escaping violent situations depend on these services. They deserve men’s support and our financial backing. That’s why we encourage White Ribbon Campaigns to raise money for local women’s programs.

## **8. EXAMINE HOW YOUR OWN BEHAVIOUR MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROBLEM**

If you’ve ever forced or pushed a woman to do something sexual she didn’t want to do; if you’ve hit, pushed, threatened, kicked your spouse or girlfriend, then you’ve been part of the problem.

If this happened in the past, admit what you did was wrong and make amends if possible. But if such behaviour has any chance of continuing, then you urgently need to get help getting to the root of your problem. Don’t wait until it happens again.

Please act today.

Most men will never be physically or sexually violent. But we all need to examine ways we might try to control women. Do we dominate conversations? Do we put them down? Do we limit their activities? Do we make the decisions?

We all must think about the choices we make. Real change starts from within.

## **9. WORK TOWARDS LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS**

Ending violence against women won’t happen overnight. Real solutions are truly long-term solutions. This is because men’s

violence against women is rooted in inequalities between men and women, and in the way men learn to be men.

Legal changes to combat men’s violence against women (such as laws against rape and battering) are very important. The police and courts must diligently enforce such laws.

But this is not enough. Let’s work together to change our attitudes and behaviour. Let’s help men be better men by getting rid of our suits of armour, that is, the attitudes which equate masculinity with the power to control. Let’s make positive changes in our relationships with women, children, and other men. Let’s involve men as caregivers and nurturers of the young.

Changes in attitude, behaviour, and institutions take time. And so we must look at how we raise future generations. We must teach our children by example so they know that using violence in personal relationships is unacceptable and that for boys to become men, they do not need to control or dominate women, men, or children.

## **10. GET INVOLVED WITH THE WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN'S EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS**

The White Ribbon Campaign (WRC) is the largest effort in the world of men working to end men’s violence against women. The WRC is a grass-roots effort, relying mainly on volunteers. It has spread from Canada to more than fifty countries. Each country sets its own direction within the overall policies of the WRC.

The focus of the campaign in Canada is on boys and young men. But it’s also aimed at older men who need to think about what examples they are setting for their sons and daughters.

Although primarily a men’s campaign, women have been active in promoting and supporting the WRC in many communities and countries.

Aside from organizing the annual White Ribbon Days, supporters can do other things throughout the year. They can hold activities in schools, communities, and workplaces; raise money for women’s groups; organize special events to support positive roles for men, including as fathers; talk to young people about building healthy relationships; start a local White Ribbon Campaign; and financially support the work of the WRC.

We encourage you to contact us or visit [www.whiteribbon.com](http://www.whiteribbon.com) to receive information on starting up a White Ribbon effort in your community, school, workplace, or place of worship.

Please don’t hesitate. Get involved today.

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# Say Something

## *When Confronted With Men's Violence Against Women*

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### CHALLENGE SEXIST JOKES AND LANGUAGE

Sexist jokes and misogynistic language help to reinforce gender stereotypes and normalize violent behaviour against women. As difficult as it may be, by challenging that kind of language and those types of jokes, you are setting a positive example by helping raise awareness about violence against women. Here is a common scenario.

Your buddy says, "I have a good joke for you."

You get a little smile on your face waiting to have a good laugh but instead you hear a joke that degrades women. It describes women as incompetent, weak, constantly hysterical, or as mere sexualized body parts. Many jokes speak of horrible violence such as rape in a supposed "lighthearted" manner.

That frozen smile is still on your face but you feel very uncomfortable inside and you know that this just does not feel right. You want to say something but the rest of the guys seem to be enjoying it. They have smiles on their faces and you don't want to be the downer of the party.

***But maybe, just maybe some of them are thinking the same thing you are and that smile on their face is just as uncomfortable as yours.***

### ***What can you say?***

Here are some suggestions:

- "Hey man that's actually not very funny. Too many guys joke about rape when rape is a traumatic event and a violent crime. Joking about it kind of makes us forget what it really is, and how serious it is."
- "Would that be funny if it was about your mother / sister / daughter / girl friend / wife?"
- There's a good chance that someone in the room has known someone close to them who has been raped or sexually assaulted - conservative stats say 51% of all Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical/sexual violence since the age 16 (The Violence Against Women Survey – Statistics Canada, 1993 and Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile – Statistics Canada, 2006). You may be surprised at the positive support you get.
- If no one supports you and you are told to "lighten up" you can simply say "I still don't find it funny. Would you be as comfortable telling a joke about people of colour or Jews?" This is especially effective if there are men from different cultures and backgrounds in the room.



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- Don't be surprised if you hear "you don't have a sense of humour." At least you've planted the seed letting them know where you stand. Challenging guys about this stuff may be a difficult thing to do but it's worth it, knowing you're doing your part to create a world where ending violence against women is taken seriously and sexism and violence are no longer a laughing matter.

- Every time you do it, it gets a little easier!

### CHALLENGE A MAN WHO IS ABUSING HIS PARTNER

If you knew your friend was abusing his girlfriend, what would you do? Many men want to say something but don't know where to start. Challenging someone about abuse is never easy and there is no one way to go about it. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Before confronting any man about his abusive behaviour, keep in mind that this may aggravate him to the point that he will take it out on his partner. The best thing to do is to talk to his partner about what you want to do. Make sure she has a safety plan in case he was to become abusive again. Help to inform her of options such as the availability of local women shelters and crisis lines. Does she have friends or family to stay with? Discuss your concerns with her and ask how you can support her. If you ever suspect that she may be in immediate danger, consider calling the police and/or helping her find a safe place to stay.
- Don't become hostile or aggressive since that will likely put that person on the defensive, and besides, you're trying to talk to him about non-violence so the last thing you want to do is follow his example. You can simply let him know that what he's doing isn't right and that it is really hurting someone he cares about.
- You may find that he will react in two different ways. He may deny the whole thing, make excuses (such as being drunk), try to blame her, or become angry at the insinuation that he was abusive. Or on the other hand, he may tell you that he feels ashamed of his behaviour. He may ask for help in ensuring that it does not happen again or he may just want to talk about it with you. When listening to him, it is important never to excuse his behaviour. Remind him that you are not judging him as a person but that you cannot allow his behaviour to continue unchecked.

- Let him know that he has control over his behaviour and what he does about it. If he is ready to make some changes, ask him to visit the White Ribbon web site ([www.whiteribbon.com](http://www.whiteribbon.com)) to obtain a contact number of a local group for abusive men in his area. For more information, you can also visit the “How to Talk to Men Who are Abusive” section of the site:  
[www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca](http://www.neighboursfriendsandfamilies.ca)

### *She kept saying “no”*

If your friend tells you how he “convinced” his date to sleep with him even though she kept saying “no”, you have a perfect opportunity to say something.

### **Any unwanted touching or sexual act committed upon another is sexual assault.**

After alerting him to this fact, he may not agree with you but *it’s still important that you say something*. You may suggest to him that he seek professional help and to cooperate with the authorities if they become involved. Again, this is not an easy thing to do and not one to be taken lightly. **Imagine that the girl or woman was your future wife, your daughter, sister, niece or mother. You would want someone to say something!**

### **DON’T SUPPORT PROGRAMMING THAT PORTRAYS WOMEN IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT**

Another way of *saying something* is to refuse to support programming that portrays women in a negative light or refuses to acknowledge the seriousness of violence against women. Write letters to the editor of a newspaper who seems to dismiss the importance of funding women’s shelters. Write to TV network executives letting them know that you will not watch programming that portrays women in stereotypical roles such as unintelligent sexual playthings, “bitchy” corporate go-getters, and submissive “man-trappers” only looking to snare a man. Write to advertising agencies to let them know that sexually objectifying women to sell products is irresponsible and degrading.

### **ALWAYS DO IT FOR THE RIGHT REASON**

Always remember that you are not speaking out because you are a hero, or because you’re saving a woman with chivalry, or because you want to be patted on the back. You are speaking out because it is the right thing to do and it is a meaningful way to do your part in ending violence against women.

### **SAY SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF**

- When thinking about putting an end to violence against women, remember the importance of taking a look at yourself and how you view and treat women.

- Do you share household duties? Do you share childcare responsibilities? Do you dominate conversations with women or are you a good listener as well? Do you believe there is ever a time where a woman “asked” for abuse? Do you use degrading language when referring to women? Do you view women as mere sex objects? Lead by example - be the change you want to see in the world.

- **Take some time to talk to the women in your life.** Ask them what their thoughts are on the issue of violence against women. Most of all, listen to them, truly listen.

- The best way to help influence other men about ending violence against women is to set an example and then spread the word.

- Be a good role model for younger men in your life (sons, brothers, nephews, etc) and teach them how men can be respectful towards women and not use sexist language, demeaning jokes, and violent behaviour towards others.

- Support and join other men who are working to make a difference and are standing up for what is right. Let them know that they are part of a larger community of caring men, since many men stay quiet simply because they think they will be alone in their stand. Direct them to the White Ribbon web site and they’ll realize they’re not alone.

- Volunteer for a local organization or help fundraise for a women’s shelter or sexual assault centre.

- Start a White Ribbon Campaign in your school, workplace, place of worship, or in your local community. Involve your teachers, school mates, co-workers, friends, family members, and local community leaders. Contact us for ideas and awareness materials.

### **THE WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN**

We welcome all men, who are serious about taking a stand against violence towards women, to use the White Ribbon Campaign as a vehicle to help create positive change for all men and boys and to make the world safer for women and girls. Please visit our web site for more information about us and the resources available.

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# Statement of Principles

## *Breaking Men's Silence to End Men's Violence*

If it were between countries, we'd call it a war. If it were a disease, we'd call it an epidemic. If it were an oil spill, we'd call it a disaster. But it is happening to women, and it's just an everyday affair. It is violence against women and girls. It is sexual harassment at work. It is the beating or the blow that millions of women suffer each and every day. It is rape at home or on a date. It is murder.

There's no secret enemy pulling the trigger, no unseen virus that leads to death. It is only men. Not all men, not most men, but far too many men.

And just who are these men? They are regular guys; men from all social backgrounds and of all nationalities and ages; rich men and poor men; men who work in factories and men who sit behind desks.

Regular guys, however, have helped create a climate of fear and mistrust among women. Many of our sisters, our mothers and our daughters, our girlfriends and our wives do not feel safe. At night they can not walk to the store for groceries without wondering who's walking behind them. It's hard for them to turn on the television without seeing displays of brutality against women and other men. Often, even the sanctuary of the home is not safe, as violence against women is disproportionately committed by men they know intimately. All women are imprisoned in a culture of violence.

Men's violence against women isn't deviant behaviour. We have created cultures where men use violence against other men, where we wreak violence on the environment, where we see violence as the best means to solve differences between nations, and where men enjoy forms of power and privilege that women do not have.

Men have been defined as part of the problem. The White Ribbon Campaign believes that men also have a role and a responsibility to be part of the solution. Confronting men's violence requires nothing less than a commitment to full equality for women and a redefinition of what it means to be men. To discover a meaning to manhood that isn't about power, control or violence.

With all of our love, respect and support for the women in our lives:



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- We urge men around the world to wear a White Ribbon each year or organize activities between November 25 and December 10, or at other times of the year. Wearing a White Ribbon is a personal, public pledge *to never commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women and girls*. The White Ribbon is a catalyst for change, change which must start from within.
- Violence against women and girls is one of the most serious human rights violations in the world. We ask unions, professional associations, student groups, corporations, religious institutions, the media, non-governmental and governmental organizations to make this an issue of priority.
- We support comprehensive laws against all forms of violence against women, funding for programs for survivors of this violence, such as shelters for battered women and rape crisis centres. We believe in services to help violent men change their behaviour.
- We call for large-scale educational and awareness campaigns to bring attention to this issue.
- We believe that respect for girls and women and equality between men and women are preconditions to ending the violence.
- We urge people to organize local and national White Ribbon Campaigns, open to all men and boys, across the political, social and economic spectrum. Violence against women has been one of the longest wars, the greatest epidemics, the biggest disasters. With strength and love, we commit ourselves to working for a future with no violence against women.

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