

## POWER &amp; POLITICS

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One in three women will experience violence at the hands of men in their lifetime but less than one-third of them will report it

**O**n Friday, we wore a white ribbon in support of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. So did my boss, Australia's Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd. So did Australian men from all walks of life.

In doing so, we joined the world's largest movement of men working to end violence against women. We joined men in all, seeking to raise awareness on gender-based violence and its profound effects on women and children.

But this is just the start. All of us – men and women, governments and civil society – must realise this is not something we need to think about on just one day of the year; or just over the 16 days of activism set aside by the United Nations that started on Friday.

We must commit to action ev-

ery day of every year. Violence against women – any act capable of causing physical, sexual or psychological harm, whether in public or private – destroys lives and has a horrendous impact on the society.

Such violence continues to be a significant problem in every country. It is a global scourge and hence requires a global response.

Worldwide, one in three women will experience violence at the hands of men in their lifetime but less than one-third of victims will report it out.

In Australia, many hundreds of women are assaulted every day. In East Africa, nearly half of all women will have suffered violence in their lifetime.

East Africa played a key role in the development of international women's rights by hosting the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women in Nairobi in 1985.

Described as "the birth of global feminism," this conference included representatives from 157 governments and more than 15,000 people participated. The

conference adopted the "Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies to the Year 2000." This document broke ground in declaring "all issues" to be women's.

**V**iolence against women is recognised globally as a fundamental development issue. Gender inequality and violence must be tackled head on for developing nations to reach their potential. As long as violence against women continues, women, children, their families, communities and nations are at risk of entrenched poverty and suffering.

By stopping violence and empowering women, we bring untold flow-on benefits to nations, developed and developing alike.

Critical to this are male advocacy training programmes. Men

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must be educated to understand the long-term effects of violence against women.

We recently met Wangu Kanja, an extraordinary woman who made a lifetime commitment to combating gender violence. She works in the slums of Nairobi to achieve respect and dignity for women.

The slogan of her foundation Sita Kimya (I will not be quiet) is a strident call to us all to oppose silence and inaction on gender violence.

The Wangu Kanja Foundation is focused on increasing the number of men who engage and participate in actions to address sexual violence against women and children.

**W**angu and others can achieve real change. Governments can also help. This year, the Australia Government appointed Ms Penny Williams as Australia's first Global Ambassador for Women and Girls to lead response to this crisis.

We have committed \$96.4

million over four years to combat violence against women. In the Pacific, Australia's own region, we are funding empowerment projects and contributing to the promising work by Pacific communities themselves.

We aim to promote greater leadership, education, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities for women, especially for those who are at the bottom class of society and therefore at the greatest risk of poverty.

But ultimately, it is about individuals and the choices they make. In Australia, men and boys are encouraged to take a pledge not to tolerate violence against women.

Men, who oppose violence in words and deeds, undertake the pledge. We hope all males in East Africa will do the same.

Tooth is Australia's High Commissioner to Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and also Australia's Ambassador to Burundi, Somalia and South Sudan. Williams is Australia's Global Ambassador for Women and Girls