



BARACK OBAMA AND JOE BIDEN: ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

"So often, victims of domestic abuse suffer in silence – they don't know where to turn, and they often have no one to turn to. And so it's easy to think that one of these victims could be somebody you love – a mother, a daughter, or a sister. . . I want you to know that you're not alone in this struggle – that there are people listening and fighting with you to bring this issue out of the darkness of isolation and into the light of justice. I want you to know that I'll continue to be one of those people."

[Barack Obama, Apna Ghar Domestic Violence Shelter, 4/11/06]

BARACK OBAMA AND JOE BIDEN'S PLAN TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Barack Obama has been a longtime and committed ally in the effort to ensure that women and children are free from violence. As a state senator, he worked with advocacy groups to pass one of the most comprehensive sets of employment law protections for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in the country. As a U.S. senator, he cosponsored and helped reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and introduced legislation to provide \$25 million a year to domestic violence prevention and victim support efforts. And throughout his career, he has been a longtime supporter of domestic violence shelters, like the Apna Ghar shelter in Chicago, which ensures that cultural and linguistic barriers do not prevent women and children from seeking assistance.

Make Domestic Violence A White House Priority: The Office of Violence against Women is currently located in the Department of Justice. The eradication of this major public health problem will require a coordinated effort from at least three governmental departments: health, education and justice. Safe and affordable housing is also a huge barrier to abused women finding freedom from violence. Sexual violence is a complex multi-system problem. No one agency can address all of the issues comprehensively. As president, as President, Barack Obama will appoint a special advisor who will report to him regularly on issues related to violence against women. This advisor will ensure that his agenda is coordinated across federal agencies and fully addresses prevention, programs, and the legal aspects of gender based violence. His administration will also issue a joint report on "best practices" across agencies and disseminate that information to the states.

Reduce Domestic Violence: One in four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. Family violence accounted for 11 percent of all violence between 1998 and 2002. In the U.S. Senate, Barack Obama introduced legislation to combat domestic violence by providing \$25 million a year for partnerships between domestic violence prevention organizations and fatherhood or marriage programs to train staff in domestic violence services, provide services to families affected by domestic violence and to develop best practices in domestic violence prevention. And as part of their anti-poverty agenda, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will create twenty "Promise Neighborhoods" in cities across the country. Building off the successful Harlem Children's Zone, these Promise Neighborhoods will work with community organizations to provide resources that strengthen families, including family counselors and anti-domestic violence programs.

Fund the Violence Against Women Act: Approximately 1,400 women a year – four every day – die in the United States as a result of domestic violence. 132,000 women report that they have been victims of a rape or attempted rape, and it is estimated that an even greater number have been raped, but do not report it. Senator Obama cosponsored and helped reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Reauthorized in January 2006, the bill provides funds to help communities, nonprofit organizations and police combat domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. The legislation also establishes a sexual assault services program and provides education grants to prevent domestic violence. As president, Obama will fully fund and implement VAWA.

Support Victims' Economic Security: Victims of domestic violence often find themselves fired for missing work in order to find shelter or to get a court restraining order, even after receiving permission from their employers. Others have experienced harassment by abusers that interferes with work performance. Studies show that between one quarter and one half of domestic violence victims report that they have lost a job due to domestic violence. And a high percentage of sexual assault victims have reported that they have lost their jobs in the aftermath of the crime. In the Illinois State Senate, Barack Obama introduced and passed one of the most comprehensive sets of employment law protections for domestic and sexual violence victims in the nation. The Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act (VESSA) ensures that victims of domestic violence can seek treatment without losing their jobs. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that similar legislation to what he passed in Illinois is necessary on the federal level. They fully support legislation such as the Security and Financial Empowerment Act, which gives victims of domestic violence greater economic stability and he is committed to enacting such legislation as president. As president, Obama will also expand the purposes for which leave can be taken under the Family Medical Leave Act to include reasons related to domestic violence or sexual assault.

Ratify UN Treaty: Barack Obama and Joe Biden support ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which is considered by many around the world to be an “international bill of rights for women.” As a human rights treaty, the Convention affirms the reproductive rights of women, supports women’s political and economic rights and highlights the importance of eradicating violence against women. Ratifying this treaty will make the United States a more active ally in the international fight to eradicate violence against women and it will serve as a model that can inspire individual states to take steps to reduce violence against women. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will work in a bipartisan way to ratify this important treaty.

Strengthen Criminal Laws: In the Illinois State Senate, Barack Obama successfully passed legislation to increase penalties on certain domestic violence offenders. Obama was chief cosponsor of a bill providing that domestic battery or a violation of an order of protection is a Class 4 felony if the offender was previously convicted of certain offenses. Obama was also chief cosponsor of a law increasing penalties for committing battery against an individual in or near a domestic violence shelter. Obama cosponsored and helped pass a law that requires the government to be specific about restrictions placed on the recipient of an emergency order of protection so that perpetrators of domestic violence cannot claim ignorance of the law. As president, Obama will continue to work to ensure that offenders are appropriately punished and that women and children are not deterred from seeking treatment or shelter.

Fight Gender Violence Abroad: The genocide in Darfur has had particularly devastating consequences for women. Tens of thousands of women have been killed, raped and displaced since the conflict began in 2003. Barack Obama has been a leading voice in Washington urging the end of genocide in Sudan. He worked with Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) on the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, a version of which was signed into law. Obama has traveled to the United Nations to meet with Sudanese officials and visited refugee camps on the Chad-Sudan border to raise international awareness of the ongoing humanitarian disaster there. He also worked with Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) to secure \$20 million for the African Union peacekeeping mission. Obama has also been a leader in the efforts to promote stability and security, and reduce sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In 2004, Amnesty International estimated that at least 40,000 women

and girls have been systematically raped and tortured in the DRC since 1998. In 2006, the United Nations reported 27,000 sexual assaults against women and girls in South Kivu province alone. Barack Obama introduced legislation in 2005, which was signed into law in 2006, that identified systematic sexual violence as a particular threat in the Congo. Obama's bill also includes a commitment to help rebuild the DRC, develop lasting political structures, hold accountable destabilizing foreign governments, crack down on corrupt politicians, professionalize the military, reduce sexual violence, and support victims of rapes and sexual assaults. The bill also authorizes \$52 million in U.S. assistance for the Congo, calls for a Special U.S. Envoy to resolve ongoing violence and urges the administration to strengthen the U.N. peacekeeping force.

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