

**26th november 2022**

# **ZONTA SAYS NO** **TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**BELGIAN ZONTA CLUBS Area 01, Area 05 and Area 06 of District 27 stood together, united their voices to advocate for all those who suffer gender-based violence: especially cyberviolence.**



From November 25th, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to December 10nd, International Human Rights Day, official buildings and public places in a large number of cities and towns will be colored orange. With this, Zonta International is drawing attention to the campaign "Zonta says NO to violence against women".

Managed by UN Women, UNITE to end violence against Women, Zonta International call on governments, civil society, women's organizations, young people, the private sector, media to join forces to address the global pandemic of violence against women.

The global theme of this year's 16 days of activism against Gender-based Violence is United in Sisterhood activism to end Cyberviolence against women and girls!

Saturday 26 November marked the kick-off of the campaign with a press conference at Brussels City Hall.

During a panel discussion with national and international speakers, gender-related digital violence was addressed. 2 in 10 adult social media users have already become victims of cyberbullying, and among young people the figure is twice as high! Special attention was paid to support and guidance for victims, but prevention is also important.



**Régine Claeys,**  
**Zonta International District 27 Area 06 Area director 2022- 2024**

Cyber violence is an increasing problem worldwide and it is too often gender-based. It can take many forms, ranging from harassment and revenge porn, to threats of rape, sexual assault or even murder. Perpetrators can be partners, ex-partners, colleagues, schoolmates or, as is often the case, anonymous individuals.

Cyber violence affects women and girls disproportionately, not only causing them severe psychological harm but also deterring them from digital participation. Some are particularly exposed, such as young girls, women's rights defenders, journalists, public figures and politicians. Online abuse and harassment limits women and girls to express themselves freely and without fear. They are being silenced and isolated.

But we cannot ignore that : digital space is significant for women and girl's empowerment!



**Sadly it is also an environment where they are similar to the physical worlds, exposed to discrimination, harassment and intimate partner violence. Violence that starts online can end in physical attacks and online violence can be a prolongation of violence that first occurred in real life.**

**And it's pushing women and girls out of online spaces, which are at the same time increasingly important for activism and advocating against inequalities and human rights issues, organizing movement, speaking up about personal experience and finding a community where they can share their stories.**

**Zonta International is committed to raise awareness and to speed up its efforts to put an end to cyber violence.**

**Today we break the silence and I urge all women to Stand up, Speak up and Rise!**





**Dagmar Schumacher, Director UN Women Brussels Office**

**Violence against women and girls is the most pervasive human rights violation worldwide.**

**With a comprehensive state of affairs, Dagmar Schumacher underlined the global need for activism to end violence against girls and women. Women's rights organizations play a crucial role in preventing violence against women and girls, advocating for and securing normative and policy change, monitoring and holding governments to account and in driving reductions in violence against women<sup>3</sup>. Yet, women's rights organizations and autonomous feminist movements remain severely underfunded. Studies show that only 1% of gender-focused aid from governments goes to autonomous women's organizations.**





**Eleonora Esposito, Researcher gender-based violence European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)**

Eleonora Esposito emphasized that gender-based violence is one of EIGE's core priorities. It is an issue which, when left unchecked, can grow in magnitude, leaving many invisible or silenced.

This year, EIGE published a report on cyber-violence against women and girls. Cyber violence against women and girls is not a new issue. As technology evolves, so does the issue. Therefore, this campaign is raising awareness with fresh perspectives and angle. Based on EIGE's new report on cyber violence against women and girls, the campaign is grounded in harmonized and mutually exclusive definitions on the different forms of cyber violence against women and girls. In the campaign, these definitions are brought into a real world context with stories and thought-provoking art - both serving as creative tools for connecting to the issue in a profound way.



**Prof. Liesbet Stevens, Instituut voor Gelijkheid van Vrouwen en Mannen (IVGM)**

Professor Liesbet Stevens provided insight into the role of the Institute for Gender Equality in combating cyber violence. Since 1 July 2020, the Institute has been authorised to assist victims of non-consensual distribution of sexually explicit content (so-called 'revenge porn'). The Institute helps victims by informing them of their rights, obligations and courses of action, supports them and sometimes takes legal action with them. The Institute recently published a study on revenge porn, online sexual harassment and other forms of cyberbullying. The Institute also recently published a recommendation on the use of stalkerware in the context of (ex-)partner violence. This is an extremely disturbing but still relatively unknown phenomenon. By publishing the recommendation, the Institute therefore aims to inform and sensitize both (potential) victims and stakeholders about this form of digital gender-based violence. Finally, the Institute also provided advice in the development of the new sexual criminal law.





**Erika Frans, senior expert sexual health at Sensoa**

**Sensoa, the Flemish centre for sexual health is one of the key players in prevention when it comes to sexually transgressive behavior. Erika Frans developed the Sensoa Flag System, a handy tool that helps schools, organizations and companies prevent incidents or assists in working on structural solutions when an incident has occurred. The Sensoa Flag System is published in book form with separate versions for children-young people and adults. An English handbook is also available.**



### **Ayke Gubbels, Director Punt vzw en Wendy Van den Heuvel**

Punt vzw, the advice and information centre for victims of sexual violence is increasingly receiving reports of cyber violence. Ayke Gubbels framed the centre's role through her personal story. Victim Wendy Van den Heuvel openly testified how her male colleagues managed to trap her via a fake profile after which the harassment at work started. She managed to turn this traumatic experience into something positive thanks to the publication of her book *Invincible*.

Lydia Muytyebele Ngoi Alderman responsible with Equal Opportunities for women and men in Brussels City Council.

Digital gender violence is on the rise in a society where social networks are on the rise. We need to take action and protect ourselves and our children from these cyber attackers. I am happy to join Zonta in this campaign. Today, thanks to the Gender Equality Action Plan launched by my cabinet, we are fighting daily and more against all forms of violence against women and gender minorities.

The press conference followed with the unveiling of a graffiti artwork commissioned by EIGE on the theme of digital sexual violence for the City of Brussels by Belgian street artist CAZn. The artwork will afterwards be given a permanent place in the building of CAPITAL, the one-stop-source that inspires, stimulates and guides Brussels youth in their personal and professional development.





The press conference was concluded with a message of Hope.

One

One tree can give life to a forest  
One smile can start a friendship  
One hand can uplift a soul  
One idea can shape the future  
One candle can wipe our darkness  
One laugh can conquer gloom  
One ray of hope can uplift your spirits  
One touch can show that you care  
One life, one voice can make a difference  
What all the panelists and testimonies of today did.  
You definitely made a difference!

I invite all of you,  
I urge you,

Be "that ' one ' today!