



THE FIRST 100 DAYS AND ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE GLOBALLY

As leading civil society organizations, we, the undersigned members of the [Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls Globally](#), believe that the United States (U.S.) can and should be a strong and consistent leader in the effort to respond to and end gender-based violence (GBV) around the world. While we represent different sector priorities—health, economic empowerment, human rights, education, girls’ rights, LGBTI people’s rights, prevention of violence, promotion of peace—we are united in our belief that women and girls are active and powerful agents of change, and we envision a world in which women and girls can enjoy their human right to live free from violence.

GBV and violence against women and girls (VAWG), in particular, significantly hinders the ability of individuals to fully realize their potential and capacity—personally, socially, politically, and economically. It is a human rights violation; a public health crisis; and is associated with limited access to education, increased costs relating to medical and legal services, and lost household productivity and income. GBV has grave impacts on the peace, prosperity, and security of communities and countries. In 2016, the global cost of violence against women was estimated by the United Nations (UN) to be [\\$1.5 trillion](#), approximately equivalent to 2% of the global gross domestic product. The existing crisis of GBV is likely to worsen in the context of COVID-19. Dubbed as the [shadow pandemic](#), emerging data show that [15 million additional](#) cases of GBV are estimated for every three months of lockdown, making it critical to effectively address GBV prevention and response. (For definitions of GBV and VAWG see Appendix I)

Despite some advances in the efforts to prevent and respond to GBV over the past few decades, the U.S. has stepped back in its leadership in multilateral and other international fora, omitted requests for GBV funding and resources, deprioritized implementation of the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally (GBV Strategy) in foreign assistance and policy initiatives, blocked dissemination of government expertise, and failed to include GBV considerations in relevant policies and initiatives. (See Appendix II for a full list of gender-related strategies)

The U.S. government in 2021 will face many pressing priorities as it seeks to undo the harm of governmental neglect of GBV initiatives and address the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it also has the opportunity not just to re-establish U.S. commitments to respond to and prevent GBV, but to offer a bold, progressive vision for ending GBV globally. It will be similarly imperative to reestablish the U.S.’s leadership on GBV issues in multilateral fora such as the Commission on the Status of Women, which will take place within the first 100 days, and in other diplomatic channels.

The priorities outlined below reflect the importance of effective policies serving all persons across their lifespans, and they recognize that people’s complex identities—including their nationality, race, religion, ethnic identity, ability, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, and more—impact whether they can access or fully enjoy their rights. Though the below suggestions are specific in their application, we urge that the prevention, mitigation, and response to GBV be approached through a “whole of government” lens rather than agency-by-agency silos. **With these goals in mind, we offer the following specific suggestions for the first 100 days:**

ESTABLISH A PRESIDENTIAL INITIATIVE ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

A whole-of-government approach to GBV and gender equality is imperative to achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives and overcoming the deleterious effects that siloed approaches have on survivors and those at risk of violence.

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Coordinated and integrated measures to address GBV will improve women's and girls' access to healthcare, education, economic opportunity, consensual marriage, and other human rights. A coordinated and multisectoral approach also eliminates wasteful, duplicative efforts within the government, saves money and resources, centralizes expertise, creates bridges amongst agencies' competencies, and addresses existing gaps in the current system that serve as a piecemeal band-aid approach.

Effectively addressing GBV requires not just recommitting to previous leadership and vision but redoubling these efforts to institutionalize and socialize this work throughout the U.S. Government's foreign policy levers. This is key to sustainable progress and reclaiming U.S. leadership on the prevention and response to GBV around the world.

Towards this end, we recommend prioritizing the following actions in the first 100 days:

1. Reaffirm [Executive Order 13623](#) and articulate additional provisions (see below) to elevate and institutionalize GBV prevention and response across the U.S. Government.
2. Establish a Presidential Task Force to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally (PTF) comprised of Secretaries of relevant Administration agencies¹. The purpose of this PTF will be to promote improved interagency coordination of global GBV response; ensure that GBV initiatives and the "Do No Harm" principle are included in gender-related policies, plans, and programs; and develop minimum standards for annual, publicly-available agency reporting to the PTF on the GBV Strategy implementation efforts.
3. Appoint a senior-level coordinator to oversee and coordinate interagency efforts on global GBV prevention and response. This senior coordinator will have the authority to develop cross-agency special initiatives to address GBV and liaise with agency-level GBV focal points to drive implementation of action plans, budget requests, and other needs. The senior coordinator will report to the President and this newly established PTF.
4. Require agency-level costed action plans and focal points to implement the GBV Strategy and integrate GBV prevention and response into the agency's programmatic and policy work. Relevant agencies required to develop costed action plans include those comprising the PTF to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally.
5. Ensure all relevant agencies have adequate capacity to implement the 2016 GBV Strategy, including necessary personnel, training, and accountability standards. Measures to implement the strategy should be developed in consultation with civil society and reflect: a whole-of-government approach; new data and metrics; new roles (e.g., the senior coordinator and agency-level focal points); proposed program goals, objectives, activities, outputs, and outcomes based on best practices and lessons learned since 2016; reporting and oversight mechanisms; and specific plans for collaboration with civil society and impacted populations.
6. Seek robust funding to implement this work through the President's Budget Request and accompanying Congressional Budget Justifications. The President should prioritize full funding for implementation of the GBV Strategy, including resources for necessary personnel and capacity-building as noted in the costed action plans. This request should be at a minimum \$300 million² and should include a Presidential fund for special cross-agency initiatives to address GBV, as well as funding for programs implemented pursuant to the U.S. National

¹ These include, at minimum, the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Defense, and Department of Homeland Security

² This funding figure aligns with civil society requests for at least \$229 million for international programs to address GBV, female genital mutilation/cutting, and child, early, and forced marriage, as well as an additional \$71 million for special interagency initiatives.

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Security Strategy, U.S. National Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security, and the Strategy on to Combat Human Trafficking, amongst other relevant strategies and policies. (See Appendix II for a full list of gender-related strategies). This funding should not come at the expense of other critical programs aimed at promoting gender equality or women's empowerment.

This Presidential initiative to elevate and institutionalize U.S. anti-GBV work across the Executive Branch should parallel strong Administration efforts to engage Congress in passing vital legislation such as the International Violence Against Women Act and robust appropriations for gender equality integration (See Appendix III for list of other relevant legislation). This initiative should also complement and coordinate with efforts to advance gender equality globally, including work to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights; women's economic empowerment; the women, peace and security agenda; combating trafficking in persons; and the rights of adolescent girls.

ESTABLISH U.S. LEADERSHIP TO ADDRESS GBV ACCOMPANYING AND EXACERBATING COVID-19

GBV is exacerbated in times of crisis, such as emergencies, climate disruption and natural disasters, and violent conflicts, including the current COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, [243 million](#) women and girls experienced sexual and/or physical violence by intimate partners. Since early 2020, domestic violence alone has increased by an estimated 30%-60%. Further, the disruption of normal life, economic strain, and food insecurity has increased the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse by partners and non-partners, as well as the prevalence of child, early, and forced marriage.

Despite international calls to prioritize GBV prevention and response due to the emerging "[shadow pandemic](#)" of GBV, the U.S. has failed to address the unique needs of women and girls at every turn, including its:

- Withdrawal from multilateral agreements and working groups, preventing united global action and denying women and girls around the world vital assistance, and;
- Deprioritization of family planning and reproductive health investments in the U.S.' foreign assistance strategy. This has hindered the ability of existing programs funded by USAID, PEPFAR, and CDC to most effectively reach GBV survivors with integrated reporting, referral, and response services during the COVID pandemic

The U.S. must reclaim its global leadership in disaster response and assistance. The U.S. must balance the demands of responding directly to COVID-19 while also supporting and expanding provision of essential GBV services: prevention and protection, clinical response, and legal and psycho-social support for survivors. It is critical to foster coordination with local partners and to return to a deep and trust-based multilateral response effort.

Toward this end, we recommend prioritizing the following actions in the first 100 days:

1. Issue an executive order that establishes a clear directive to respond to the VAWG Shadow Pandemic diagnosed by the UN. This executive order should:
 - a. Empower USAID, the CDC, Department of State, Department of Defense, USDFC and other foreign facing agencies to integrate prevention and response to GBV in their COVID-19 efforts. Direct agencies to systematically tackle and eliminate legal, financial, and attitudinal barriers that hinder efforts to address GBV. Task agencies to develop a specific GBV strategy within their COVID response plans within 120 days, including integration of dedicated funding allocations into upcoming investments.

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- b. Coordinate a strong GBV response throughout the U.S. global COVID response plan, with leadership directly from GBV experts in the White House. Foster interagency coordination and partnership with foreign national partners. Articulate a mandate to strengthen psycho-social and protective services for survivors of violence, including trauma-informed sexual and reproductive health care. Recommend the prioritization of funding support to organizations running domestic violence shelters and other protective services.
2. Center prevention and response to VAWG in multilateral global health efforts, including funding WHO and UN COVID response efforts. This should be spearheaded by leadership from the U.S., alongside the World Health Organization, UNFPA, UN Women, and other GBV experts from leading private sector and non-profit representatives, to: 1) develop rapid response plans for prevention of GBV spikes during future global health and/or humanitarian crises; and 2) secure GBV response teams that can be quickly deployed to provide technical assistance and support to governments during future pandemics.

REAFFIRM GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AS GROUNDS FOR ASYLUM

The 2018 decision in [Matter A-B-](#) and subsequently [proposed rules](#) and updated procedures enacted by the Department of Homeland Security have dramatically undermined efforts to provide protections for those fleeing from violence and, with it, the U.S.'s position on the international stage as a leader in the protection of human rights. The decision sought to limit asylum claims based on domestic violence, reversing decades of advocacy, preference, and expansion of rights granted under the [Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees](#); contradicting international legal obligations, guidelines, and practices around protections; demonstrating a narrowed understanding of the myriad forms of persecution and violence women and girls face; and subverting the U.S.'s legal and ethical commitments to refugees and displaced persons. The attempted elimination of gender-based asylum disproportionately impacts women and girls and has led to their return to countries and homes replete with violence, thus violating the international legal principle of [non-refoulement](#). However, existing immigration law bars asylum to any applicant who has committed domestic violence. This recognition of the inherent danger of GBV perpetrators stands counter to the rejection of gender-based asylum where the U.S. returns GBV survivors into the hands of their abusers. Reaffirming gender-based asylum as grounds for protection is essential to support the most vulnerable and marginalized.

We urge the Administration to remember:

- Gender-based asylum seekers are not doing so under fraudulent terms but rather because these forms of violence are genuine, pervasive, and demonstrate a real threat to their well-being.
- Failure to recognize GBV as grounds for asylum contradicts existing U.S. law that seeks to protect survivors of violence (such as the Violence Against Women Act), breaks from international law and practice providing and expanding protections for survivors of violence, and reinforces the devaluation of violence against women and girls as less important or life-threatening than other forms of violence.

At a time of global crisis as a pandemic is decimating entire communities and countries, women and girls are being forced to endure record levels of domestic and other GBV. Now is the time for the U.S. to rise and help give survivors the opportunity to thrive.

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Toward this end, we recommend prioritizing the following actions in the first 100 days:

1. Withdraw the proposed regulation titled “Procedures for Asylum and Withholding of Removal; Credible Fear and Reasonable Fear Review” (June 15, 2020) in its entirety or, if it is already implemented, rescind the final rule and favorably reconsider any asylum applications whose denials were based on application of the rule.
2. Rescind former Attorney General (AG) Sessions’ opinion in the *Matter A-B* diverging from established Board of Immigration Appeals’ case law on asylum standards based on gang violence and domestic violence and favorably reconsider any asylum applications whose denials were based on application of the rule.
3. Direct the Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security to immediately propose a revised rule related to procedures for asylum and withholding of removal, as well as credible fear and reasonable fear review, consistent with the standards outlined in [Grace v. Barr](#) (formerly known as *Grace v. Whitaker*), to ensure that women and girls who have a credible fear of GBV are eligible for asylum. The court’s decision in that case should be implemented fully by DHS and DOJ.
4. Issue a policy memorandum reaffirming that one’s gender and other protected categories consistent with [UNHCR Guidelines on Gender and on Social Group](#), can constitute a basis for asylum under the “particular social group” (PSG) grounds and rejecting recent policy changes articulating the contrary. The policy memorandum should follow the UNHCR Guideline on International Protection Nos. [1](#) and [9](#).
 - a. This should also instruct the DHS Secretary and the AG to promulgate joint regulations that establish a PSG, without any additional requirements, is a group whose members:
 - i. Share a characteristic that is immutable or fundamental to identity, conscience, or the exercise of human rights; or
 - ii. Share a past experience or voluntary association, that due to its historical nature cannot be changed; or
 - iii. Are perceived as a group by society.
5. Collaborate with Congress to swiftly pass the Refugee Protection Act, which would protect survivors of GBV.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. government can and should be a leader in ending gender-based violence globally. The first 100 days of the U.S. government in 2021 will be crucial in undoing the harm of governmental neglect of GBV initiatives and in addressing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate further with the Administration in the achievement of these goals for the first 100 days and beyond.

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APPENDIX I - Definitions of Key Terms

Definition of gender-based violence (GBV): Umbrella term for any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived biological sex, gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity. It is rooted in structural gender inequalities, patriarchy, and power imbalances. GBV is typically characterized by the use or threat of physical, psychological, sexual, economic, legal, political, social and other forms of control and/or abuse. GBV impacts individuals across the life course and has direct and indirect costs to families, communities, economies, global public health, and development. (U.S. Department of State. [United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally](#). Washington, D.C., 2016)

Definition of violence against women and girls (VAWG): Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (United Nations. [Declaration on the elimination of violence against women](#). New York : UN, 1993.)

Additional notes: Gender-based violence disproportionately impacts women and girls.

APPENDIX II - Relevant Executive Branch Strategies and Policies

U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally (GBV Strategy)

Published in 2012, accompanying an executive order on Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Women and Girls Globally, and updated in [June 2016](#). This USAID and State Department strategy represents a “multi-sector approach that includes the justice and legal, security, health (including sexual and reproductive health), education, economic, social services, humanitarian, and development sectors, and that works at the individual, family, community, local, national, and global levels.”

U.S. National Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS Strategy)

Required by the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, which was signed into law on October 6, 2017. The Strategy, published in [June 2019](#) promotes processes within State, DOD, DHS and USAID to prevent, mediate, resolve, and recover from deadly conflict or disaster. This strategy replaced the more comprehensive [U.S. National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security](#) originally released in 2011 and updated in June 2016.

U.S. Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk from Violent Extremism and Conflict

Released publicly in [October 2018](#), this State Department and USAID strategy seeks to “limit the destabilizing effects of violent extremism, including the risks it poses to women and girls, by supporting women and girls as actors in countering terrorist ideology to prevent terrorist radicalization in their families, communities, countries, and online.”

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Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking, the Importation of Goods Produced with Forced Labor, and Child Sexual Exploitation

Department of Homeland Security strategy to end all forms of human trafficking and child sexual exploitation [released in 2018](#).

U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls

This strategy, the first ever by the U.S. to empower girls, was [launched in March 2016](#). The strategy coordinates U.S. efforts to “ensure adolescent girls are educated, healthy, economically and socially empowered, and free from violence and discrimination, thereby promoting global development, security, and prosperity” across the Department of State, USAID, the Peace Corps, MCC, PEPFAR and other departments / agencies.

USAID Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment

USAID policy intended to “...improve the lives of citizens around the world by advancing equality between females and males, and empowering women and girls to participate fully in and benefit from the development of their societies.” The policy integrates gender equality and female empowerment throughout strategic planning, project design and implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. [Released in 2012](#). Update [forthcoming](#) in 2020.

U.S. National Security Strategy

Outlines national security concerns and detailing the Administration’s plans to address them. Current (2017) and previous National Security Strategies have recognized the importance of empowering women. The [2010](#) and [2015](#) NSS recognized violence against women / gender-based violence around the world as concerns for the United States.

This list of policies and strategies is for reference only. Organizations signing this document do not necessarily support or endorse any or all of these strategies.

APPENDIX III - Relevant GBV Legislation

International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA)

This legislation ensures that combating gender-based violence is a priority within U.S. foreign policy, including our development programs and diplomatic efforts. The House and Senate bills in the 116th Congress differ. The strongest version ([H.R. 5267](#)) codifies the Office of Global Women’s Issues within the U.S. Department of State and the GBV Strategy released in June 2016, updates and enhances emergency response mechanisms for violence against women and girls abroad, and ensures that gender-based violence prevention and response are included in all U.S. humanitarian efforts.

Safe From the Start Act

This legislation would codify the [Safe from the Start Initiative](#). This initiative addresses the needs of women and girls and other groups at risk of GBV in emergencies such as conflict, natural disasters, or other crises. The House and Senate bills in the 116th Congress differ. The most comprehensive version ([H.R. 4092](#)) lays out key components of GBV prevention and response from the earliest onset of a crisis, including access to GBV support services (including health),

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development and promotion of standards and guidelines, authorizing assistance for local actors and international NGOs, and safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian personnel.

Support UNFPA Funding Act

This act authorizes appropriations for UNFPA's core functions and programs, including ending GBV and harmful practices like child marriage and female genital cutting, as well as supporting U.S. humanitarian efforts. The bill was only introduced in the House ([H.R.4722](#)) in 116th Congress.

This list of legislation is for reference only. Organizations signing this document do not necessarily support or endorse any or all of these bills.

Signed,

American Humanist Association
American Jewish World Service
Amnesty International USA
CARE USA
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities
Center for Victims of Torture
CHANGE (Center for Health and Gender Equity)
ChildFund International
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
FHI 360
Free the Slaves
Futures Without Violence
Gender Action
Global Rights for Women
Global Woman P.E.A.C.E. Foundation
Gutmacher Institute
Institute for International Law and Human Rights
International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law
International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
International Justice Mission
Jewish Women International
Justice for Migrant Women

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United Nations Association of the USA
Universal Access Project
Vital Voices Global Partnership
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Women Graduates USA
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Women Watch Afrika, Inc.
Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO)
Women's Learning Partnership
Women's Refugee Commission
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