

VENEZUELA - WORLD SOCIAL FORUM - Violence Against Women in the Dock (Patricia Grogg, IPS)

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27/01/2006 - [IPS](#) - *Women who are victims of various kinds of gender-related violence and discrimination will testify at a "world tribunal", as part of the Latin American phase of the VI World Social Forum, which opens Tuesday in Caracas.*

"The idea is to bring to light what the dominant capitalist system is hiding," Humberto Miranda told IPS. The activist is a member of the coordinating group that is organising the "international women's tribunal against free-market patriarchal violence", supported by a number of organisations.

"Statistics show that women are the most exploited and the poorest of the poor, but western cultural patterns keep the gender perspective hidden," the Cuban researcher added.

Hence, the purpose of the tribunal includes drawing attention to this situation and "making visible what is invisible," as well as challenging the official viewpoint on human rights, which ignores the daily drama of millions of people who lack the basic elements for life and development.

The tribunal will convene next Friday, and although it has no legal powers, the personal accounts of its "witnesses" will highlight the impact of problems ranging from social exclusion to State terrorism and other abuses.

Possible witnesses include U.S. peace activist Cindy Sheehan, whose son Casey was killed in combat in Iraq, and Maribel Permy of Spain, mother of television cameraman José Couso, who was killed by U.S. forces in Baghdad while he was working.

Women living with HIV, the AIDS virus, will also take the stand, as will immigrants to the United States, trade unionists, human rights activists and small farmers from Central America, and survivors of the armed conflict in Colombia and of the former dictatorships of South America's Southern Cone region.

Other issues to be addressed by the tribunal are "femicide", an extreme form of gender-specific violence which is especially serious in countries like Mexico and Guatemala.

According to parliamentary sources, 1,942 women were murdered in Guatemala between 2001 and 2005, and 625 women were killed in Mexico in 2004 alone.

In Guatemala and Mexico, the roots of femicide include social causes, organised crime and deep-rooted impunity, according to studies cited at a late 2005 meeting of legislators from Guatemala, Mexico and Spain held in Madrid.

The international women's tribunal against free-market patriarchal violence forms part of the first thematic area of the World Social Forum (WSF), on "Power, politics and struggles for social emancipation."

"You can't have an emancipation project that doesn't take all these problems into account," said Miranda, a member of the Latin America Group: Social Philosophy and Axiology, at the Institute of Philosophy, affiliated to the Cuban Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment.

The organisations responsible for the tribunal also include the El Taller International non-governmental organisation (NGO), headed by Corinne Kumar, who is also a founding member of the Asian Women's Human Rights Council.

The Intellectuals' Network in Defence of Humanity, Hemispheric Encounters against the Free Trade Area of the Americas, the World March of Women and the Latin American Network of Women Transforming the Economy are also involved.

The WSF is an annual meeting of representatives of civil society from all over the world. The first WSF was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001, as an alternative to the World Economic Forum in Davos, an exclusive ski resort in Switzerland, which has brought together global business and political leaders every year since 1971.

This year the sixth WSF is being held in three cities on three different continents: Bamako, the capital of Mali; Caracas, the capital of Venezuela; and Karachi, a major financial centre in the south of Pakistan on the Arabian Sea.

Some 100,000 activists from around the world are expected in Caracas, where they will participate in nearly 2,000 different activities, centred on six thematic areas. The first covers debates on the State, political parties and social movements, as well as practical forms of resistance against domination and political violence.

The second area, "Imperial strategies and popular resistance", will involve issues ranging from imperialist military expansion to terrorism and free trade, while the third, "Resources for and rights to life: alternatives to the predatory model of civilisation", will give rise to discussions about privatisation of resources and global warming, among other issues.

In the fourth area, "Shifting diversities, identities and worldviews", the workshops and seminars will focus on indigenous people and afro-descendants, inter-religious dialogue, gender identity and sexual diversity.

Problems such as instability of employment, exclusion, inequality and poverty will be discussed within the fifth thematic area, "Work, exploitation and reproduction of life".

The sixth area, "Communication, culture and education: alternative and democratising dynamics", will include discussions on the right to communication to strengthen citizenship and participative democracy, and resistance against the commercialisation of communications and the concentration of media ownership.

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