Editorial

8th March is International Women's Day. For women's renaissance this is a memorable day, this is a day where the women's movement is contemplated. To celebrate this day, a gathering was held on the 7th March at Central Shahid Minar, which was filled with aware men. Artists, singers and actors, writers, journalists, trade unionists, lawmakers, academics along with men from different areas of society joined together for this day. Working men and young boys also came together. Thousand's of men joined together to pronounce in one voice the slogan 'Today men vow/Not to throw acid', with this, Shahid Minar was alive with the feeling of men uniting against violence against women. The background of Shahid Minar had banners, which stood out like the sun, while festoons proclaiming men's pledges fluttered like the branches of a tree! The overriding theme of the day was men have a responsibility to end all violence against women and children; this sentiment was expressed through the different means of songs, poems and drama.

Acid Survivors Foundation initiated this historical men's involvement. ASF believes that it is true for men to be involved in the movement against violence against women. One aware man can raise awareness in another man.. One aware man can stand against acid violence and other forms of violence against women and children and loudly proclaim 'NO'. A positive step taken by a man and an aware man's attitude will set an example to other men, and become the role model of other boys and young men.

Besides our normal contributors, this edition of Voice has contributions from different people sharing their experiences and views on International Women's Day. ASF's Founding Trustee and Action Aid's Country Director Nasreen Huq's untimely death is a blow to her family, friends and all who knew her. We pay our respects and offer our condolences to her and her family. We would also like to thank all our readers.
ASF's declaration for International Women's Day

While all over the world, women are taking positive steps forwards; the women of our country are facing different forms of torture through out every moment. Torture such as the deplorable acid attack. Everyday, countless of women and children are losing their normal lives by being burnt in these barbaric attacks; amongst whom, a noticeable number are below the age of 18.

This heinous crime destroys societal balance and has heldback the nation's developmental process. From families, from society and from the state, we need to remove this abominable offence. We need to voice our protest loudly while prevention needs to be more organized. We need to emphasize that these offenders have no place in the home, in society and in the state. To confront this frightful societal problem, to protest against these attackers and to empower women and children, it is most important for men to come forward today. It is important that men's attempt of endorsing this campaign resonates throughout all households.

One aware man can raise awareness in another man. An aware man, by endorsing the stance against acid attacks will not stay quiet, but will say "NO" to all forms of violence against women and children. We need to ensure women's human rights in the following three areas: a life, free from oppression and violence, freedom of speech and finally, involvement in the decision making process in the household; society and state.

8th March is international Women's Day. Men and women on an equal foundation are contributing to create a healthy and happy home, and finally, a peaceful society. Today's objective is to implement an example for men. Those who oppose acid attacks will always and everyday oppose all forms of violence against women. In celebration of international Women's Day, active and concerned men are taking part in Dhaka and in different districts. In this respect, as an aware man, join hands with us. Make your friends and colleagues aware.

Our Pledge:
- Effective implementation of the Acid Crime Control act of 2002, speedy trials need to be ensured.
- The government must uphold the Acid Control Act.
- The support service for attacked women needs to be ensured.

International Women’s Day

International Women's Day was first celebrated in 1910 at the second conference of women's socialist group, held in Copenhagen, Denmark. The German activist Clara Zetkin proposed the observation of 8th March as International Women's Day, and her proposal was accepted in full support. Since 1911, the day has been celebrated on 8th March with pride. Clara Zetkin chose this day to commemorate the historical significance of women's struggle. On 8th March, 1957, female workers from a needle factory in New York, protested against inhuman working conditions, low wage, and long 12 hour working days. When they set out a procession, the police broke up the rally by charge balloon.

Many women were injured and arrested. By protesting against the suppression of capitalists, the women workers from needle and garment factories have made this day memorable. Today the UN recognizes International Women's Day as this day is celebrated with extravagance throughout the world. This is the day to express solidarity towards women for all of their struggles throughout history. In 1977, the UN passed a resolution that asked each of the member countries to establish a day as women's rights day and international peace day. 8th March is recognized as International Women's Day throughout most of the world. This day is not celebrated and observed just for women in the labour force, but a day to relieve all of women's suffering and raise voice against violence against women. In 2005, women's day slogan is 'women want equal rights in the process of decision-making in every aspect of life.'
On Monday 6th March 2006, at 3pm in the Press Club VIP lounge, ASFs Trustee S.A.M. Sawkot Hossain, Executive Director, Monira Rahman, Programme Coordinator Mahbuba Haque Kumkum, Girl Child Advocacy Forums’ secretary Nasima Akhter Jolly and Save the Children Sweden’s representative Khaleda Akhter Shanta informed journalists of the Men’s Gathering for International Women’s Day, at Central Shahid Minar, on the 7th March 2006. They were informed that the men’s gathering was organised to raise mass awareness against acid attacks. The same would occur on the 8th March, in the five districts Barisal, Shatkhira, Comilla, Sirajgonj and Bogra, where they observed International Women’s Day in the same way.

Journalists were informed that the majority of acid attacks are perpetrated by men. If men are not educated, then these attacks will not stop. Therefore, in order to raise mass awareness against acid violence, the men’s gathering was introduced. In 2002 the rate of acid attacks was 489, in 2005 this reduced to 268. From inception of the mass awareness campaign, men have managed to rise up against acid attacks.

On Tuesday 7th March 2006, at 4pm, in celebration of International Women’s Day, men of different organisations came together in Central Shahid Minar for a gathering, organized by ASF. The event started with a procession of 5pm, which consisted of many men and boys from different organizations, including: Boys from UCEP, workers from the Hazaribagh Tannery workers Union and men and women who have been attacked by acid representing ASF. The participating organizations carried banners with slogans protesting against acid violence.

At the gathering, the message against acid attacks was sent out through the songs and drama performed by the survivors. One of several shows also received, Gauri Shankar and Subhajit Sarkar’s song ‘Gachhi Fakir Alo’ of the event with the song ‘Aa purusher ongkari, acid nikkop no aati’.

The opening speech was read by Ramendu Majumder and other speakers were: Journalist and writer Anisul Haque, Dr. Moidul Islam Khan, Chairman of the Trade Union Group, Mr. Bodul Alam Majumder, Country Director of Hunger Project Bangladesh, Barrister Rakonuddin Mahmud, Vice Chairman Bangladesh Bar Council, Riaz Uddin Ahmed, the Chairman of the National Press Club, Dwarkan Sulttan Ahmed, FECCI President, Misinul Rahman, Editor of Prothom Alo, Jahidul Islam representative of UCEP, M. Hamid, Group Theatre Federation, Hazaribagh Tannery Worker’s Union President, Abdul Kalam Azad, ASF’s Trustee S.A.M. Shokhet Hossain and acid survivor Bashiruddin.

The rock band Black Eyes performed a song ‘this girl can’t simply trade her wings’ which was written specifically for Acid violence, Abruti Shomonnay Parishad’s General Secretary Akhiamul Hossain recited Subhajit Sarkar’s Poem ‘Kali’. The poem represents different types of violence against women. Shubhro Dev sang ‘honest people never throw acid’, a song written and composed by acid survivors. Acid survivors performed ‘Aina’ an emotional play written by them to portray their feelings. Uddichi Shilpi Goshti closed the event, with the Rabindra Sangeet, ‘Aguner poroshonto sawal pranthe, aye jibon porkorro’ as men stood together to voice their outrage over acid violence and to light candles in remembrance of the victims.

ASF’s Chairperson Sigma Huda, thanked all who were involved in the rally and the whole event was hosted by ASFs Executive Director, Monira Rahman. ASFs partner organisations for arranging the event were: BRAC, CARE Bangladesh, Concern, Komo Shishu Advocacy Forum, Save the Children Sweden Denmark, MRDI, Hazaribagh Tannery Workers Union. In order to aid with the running of the programme on the day, the Girls Guides, BNCC, Scouts and other groups volunteered. We would also like to extend our thanks to the local law enforcers for providing the security for the day.
Photo feature on Men Gathering organized by ASF on 7th March 2006

In order to unite men against acid attacks on women and children, I have dedicated this song especially for today. "Today men pledge to stop acid throwing."
Fakir Alamgir, Singer

Those who throw acid need to be punished. I want to ask the government, why so many people die from crossfire, but no acid attacker's do so. And vow that next year, not a single case will be scarred by acid.
Anisul Haque, Writer & Journalist

Violence against women is not new, but goes back generations, which we have inherited. We need to end this. When we use violence against women, we not only destroy women, but our self-respect and ourselves.
Dr. Badruddin Majumder
Country Director, The Hunger Project

As a lawmaker, I am embarrassed to say that despite our laws, these laws are not being followed. The witnesses to this is the Acid Prevention Act 2002. We need to ensure that laws are being followed.
Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud
Vice Chairman, Bar Council

We pledge that where there are acid attacks and attackers, we will arrive with our pens and cameras.
Riaz Uddin Ahmed
President, National Press Club

We felt that if after hearing this song, even if one person stops throwing acid, then we will have succeeded.
Sujit Islam
Singer "Black Eyes"

Acid throwing does not just harm a person but ruins their life. Acid attacks are the worse amongst crimes against women. As men are the main perpetrators of these attacks, men need to work against these attacks.
Dawan Sultan Ahmed
Vice president, FBCCI

Vote of thanks by Sigma Huda
Chairperson, ASF

Order of speakers/performers is maintained from left to right.
We have shattered our mirror, but society is yet to break it's image.
Ama

You have seen our sister's who have survived acid attacks. You have seen their tears. Behind their tears, are the tears of all Bangladeshi women and children who have been subjected to violence.
Matiur Rahman
Editor, The Daily Prothom Alo

Acid attacks are heinous, it affects our mothers and sisters while hamstring to children as well.
Jahidul Alam Khan
Adolescent boy, UCEP Bangladesh

Today I hope for the future where we don't have to hear of another acid attack, where we don't have to treat another victim.
Shubro Dev, Singer

On behalf of all theatre groups, we express solidarity with Acid Survivors on this day. All theatre groups will stand against acid throwers and all perpetrators of violence.
M. Hamid
President, Group Theatre Federation

We who are opposed to acid attacks, stand against the attacks, and on behalf of all workers' show our solidarity.
Abul Kalam Azad
President, Hajanbeag Tanari Workers Union

On this day, in front of the Shahid Miner, with a united voice, would like to announce that we don't want to see anymore acid attacks. No more violence on women.
S.A.M. Showkat Hossain
Trustee, ASF

I would like to thank everyone for standing beside acid survivors today. Everyone needs to work together to prevent this.
Bashir Uddin
Survivor

'Aguner parashomoni chohaw prane'- Song by Udichi Shibi Ghosti

Program Coordinated by -
Monira Rahman
Executive Director, ASF

Vow to resist acid attack
Men's gathering on International Women's Day at five districts

Sirajgonj
'No oppression in the family, we want love.' We are true men and will stop oppression of women and children.' Stop all forms of violence against women.' Say NO to acid.' These were the many slogans on the posters, festoons, placards and banners of the Sirajgonj town gathering. The people gathered in Sirajgonj Stations, Freedom Square where International Women's Day was closed.

Director of Sirajgonj Ummanay Mahila Sangstha, Shafina Lohani presided over the day, while the chief guest ADC Selina Akhter gave the inaugurating speech. She stated that men need to stand united against all violence against women. Sirajgonj Press Clubs co-host Helal Ahmed also made a proclamation. Participants and speakers at the gathering were: President of District Lawyers Association, representative of the Human Rights Lawyers Association, representative of Bangladesh United Hindu, Buddhist and Christian Association, representative of the Human Rights Defence Association, President of the Nagorki Shamaj, Daily Observer's Sirajgonj Correspondent, President of the Sirajgon United Cultural Group, and President of Sirajgon Ummanay Mahila Sangstha worker group. As well as these, different trade groups, freedom fighters and student groups gave speeches. The Rabindra Setu Sangstha 'Aguner Poroshomi howar praner' was sung while spectators lit candles. The gathering was closed with a cultural programme where songs and dramas were performed by the Sirajgon Women's Rights Drama Forum.

Shatkhira
On International Women's Day, the main premises were 'Women in decision making' and 'Don't stay silent, Say no to women persecution loudly'. With the help of ASF, the gathering was initiated by Agrogati Sangstha and the management of Shatkhira Development Network (SDN) the gathering was held and candles were lit at Shahid Abdur Razzak Park. Principal Ashim Kumar Majumdar chaired the gathering. District Information Officer Md. Nurul Huda, Advocate Farida Akter Banu, Professor Abu Ahmed, Advocate Dilip Dev, Pobitro Mohon Das, Tajbih Rahman, and Harunur Rashid gave speeches.
Comilla

Men gathered to denounce acid violence and oppression of women and children in Comilla’s central Shahid Minar. The gathering consisted of a rally, solidarity speech, reading out of the declaration, taking an oath, lighting of candles followed by a cultural programme afterwards. The men’s gathering was a joint effort of Aid Comilla, Pratibyo and SHARP. President of Comilla District Lawyers Association, Advocate Sayed Abdullah Pintu, also co-organised the rally with ASF, gave the inaugurating speech. Dedication of solidarity was given by the representative of Comilla Town Hall, Promoter of Shochohun Nagorik Committee, Chairperson of Comilla Traders Society Federation, Pratibyo, Sharak, and Executive Director Dash and Page, Project Director of Dostho ma aur Shishu Kollan Foundation, representative of Comilla Journalists Association, NGO Forum, representative of Holudia Mahila Sangsha, owner of a gold shop, and Somo Shilpi. The programme was chaired by Rokeya Begum Shefali, Executive Director of Aid Comilla.

ASF Abdul Mahmud who is the member secretary of District Acid Control Committee thanked all who attended. The gathering was finished with a vow to end acid violence and lighting of candles.

Statistics of Acid Attack 1999 to 2006 (March)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of Incident</th>
<th>Number of Person Attacked</th>
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<tr>
<td>May-Dec 1999</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>58, 19, 62</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16, 10, 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40, 28, 17</td>
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Note: The statistics mentioned are those recorded by the ASF
- Information taken from Newspapers, Local NGOs who come directly to ASF, Local Journalists and Individuals
- ASF launched in May 1999
- Please mention the source of VOICE/ASF

Support of ASF towards Acid Survivors: January - March '06

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Medical Support</th>
<th>Legal Support</th>
<th>Social Reintegration Support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activities of other organizations on International Women's Day

International Women's Day Observation Committee

The international women's day observation committee met on at 9 am to discuss the upcoming event. Present on the day were: Acid Survivors Foundation, Nari Unnayan Shokti, Centre for Services and Information On Disability (CSID), Aparajyo Bangladesh, Concern, Disabled Women's Development Network, Bangladesh Disabled Welfare Group, Gonoshastho Kendro, CARE, Durjoy Nari Sangho, Assistance for Slum Dwellers, Naripokkho, Bangladesh Women Health Care Coalition, Narinomi, Ulka Nari Sangho, Palli Darido Bimochon Foundation, Caritas, Shatabdi Samajkali Sanshob, Durbar Network Karmiroschi, Shakti Foundation for Disabled Women, Agrogi Sangstha, Association for Community Development, Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts Incidence Bangladesh and Save the Children (Sweden, Denmark and UK) all 25 took part in the committee.

Samarjik Protirodha Committee

On behalf of International Women's day, more than 20 organizations came under one banner to arrange a gathering and a cultural programme. The committee's chairperson was Hena Dash, while the Chief Guest was Sebib Suprobha of the Mohila Parishad who read an oath of solidarity. She also stated that the government's work for equality remains invisible, the effects of their work are not obvious. Also, the mentality of men has not changed or improved, the government is also committing violations against human rights and democracy in the name of security. Society needs to remove fundamentalism from the government and implement a secular form of democracy.

Amongst the women activists at the gathering were: Ayesha Khanam, Shirin Akther, Rokeya Rafique Baby, Rekha Chowdury, Khushi Kabir, Shibna Ferdous, Gigi Ara Nasreen, Rascheda Akther Khanum, Salma Khan. The gathering was followed by a cultural programme.
Prothom Alo Sahayak Tahabini

A child called Bably danced to the song 'I'll be home for Christmas'. The little girl has captured everyone with her charming dance. However, as soon as the audience heard that her father had poured acid in her mouth while she was only seven months old, their expression switched to that of horror and sadness. This was the effect that Bably had on the audience on International Women's Day gathering organized by Prothom Alo. In aid of International Women's Day, Prothom Alo Trust Foundation also donated money for acid attacked women, to help them with social establishment. The following events, organized by Prothom Alo were held in aid of International Women's Day:

The day before International Women's Day, a gathering was held and men took part in a procession, where they held banners with the slogan: '-aware men will stop acid attacks', the procession started at National Museum and finished at Central Shahid Minar, via Dhaka University. Similar programmes were also held in 77 different places at the same time. On International Women's Day, female acid survivors gave speeches and sang songs. Also, Ponchom Shur performed a dance performance of acid survivors performed a dance to demonstrate their situation. The CD of the drama called 'Thin Oddho' was also released, which was produced by Prothom Alo and directed by Mustafa Sarwar Faruki. Other participants on the day were Fahmida Nobi and Samim Chowdhury. As well as these, pledges of solidarity were read out and speeches given by ASF's Executive Director Monira Rahman and the singer of Prometheus, Biplab. Towards the end of the days events, the Prothom Alo music video of the songs 'Soth Manush koloha acid chor' and 'Acid chare kaporushi' were played. The programme was hosted by Prothom Alo's assistant editor Shumana Sharmin.

CARE's Programme

On behalf of International Women's Day CARE held rallies, while ribbon campaigns and discussion meetings on women's issues in the nine districts of: Bogra, Dinajpur, Jessore, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Rangamati, Rangpur, Tangail, Kishoregonj. Men from all areas of society came together and proclaimed that all men need to come forward against violence against women lit candles in commemoration of victims of violence at central Shahid Minar.

Poem to Men

The poem focuses on men and asks them not to view women as objects, to be played with, but as humans. The author asks men to see women as their mothers, sisters and children. It poses the question whether men will feel any remorse after they have attacked a woman with acid. Finally, it asks men to draw a monument of love in their hearts.

Shukla Rani
Survivor
Acid burn baby, Durjoy in critical condition. Doctors want to see a miracle.

"Sebina Durjoy's mother had given him the polio immunization and left him with his aunt while she went to cook. That moment was perfect for Eti Rani's sister-in-law to attack. However, in a family where there's a goldsmith who uses acid, they perhaps did not recognize the devastating effects of acid burns. But Durjoy is facing the consequences at every moment of his life.

Dr. Durjoy's parents are very honest and simple people. As of today, they still have not heard Durjoy's first words. But Durjoy uses his eyes to express his feelings. Efforts are now underway to try to get Durjoy to speak. This attempt is now very important.

Having been treated at Bograpara hospital, Jessore Sadar hospital, the 250-bed hospital of Khulna, it was in Dhaka Medical College Hospital's burn unit where British Surgeon Dr. William Hiles contacted ASF and Durjoy was transferred to Acid Survivors Hospital, Jibon Tara.

Durjoy's parents are given mental support at Jibon Tara of Acid Survivors Foundation, so that they are able to handle any sort of news regarding their son. They still think Durjoy is well. That little boy is fighting for his life in the ICU to dispel all our fears.

STOP PRESS

Durjoy has been transferred from Central Hospital to Jibon Tara where he has been in the ICU for the last two months. His situation is critical. At present, he is breathing through a tracheotomy tube, which is tube connected to his neck. To prevent him from catching an infection he is kept in isolation. A committee of Surgeons met recently and has decided that Durjoy needs to be sent abroad for further treatment. This will be very expensive, and the treatment will cost 20 lakhs Taka. For this, we are asking for everyone's help. This little soul is struggling hard to stay with us.

Pelash Chowdhury"
Increasing the punishment to the acid throwers is not only the way. Capital punishment is not the way to change the society. It will never bring change. A large & regular campaign to the grass root level can make it possible. If we are talking about violence, we are surrounded by violence; our families have a lot of violence, our workplace has violence. One of the main reasons of the violence is poverty. In today’s Bangladeshi capitalist society jobs are not secure. If for instance, the factory I work in shuts down - I will not have a job, then I don’t have a place to vent out my anger, but to beat my wife and scold and beat my daughter. To change this, the whole economic and educational situation of the country needs to be improved. Nowadays it is difficult to get the children admitted to school. Boys are given precedence over girls. If a man is limited by finance his son will be given precedence over his daughter. If a girl is attacked people react we need to take this revolution to another level to be successful.

It is very good to be here as a man. And it could be better if I could bring my wife and children with me. And we men gathered here - is good to feel but it needs to be put into a chain.

Dr.Zafarullah Chowdhury
Project Co-ordinator, Gonoastho Kendro
The society is dominated by men, the power is set aside to the men, mostly men throw acid so without addressing it is not possible to stop acid violence. And considering this, Acid Survivors Foundation has taken exactly the right initiative, which needs to be expanded.

_Aci_ 
StringBuilder Bokul
_Development Theatre Specialist & Group Theatre Activist_

The initiative is undoubtedly admirable. It is not responsible that only the women will fight against the violence against women - the man are also a part of it. And the issue is not for men or women it is humanity. And this gathering will help a lot to achieve the goal.

_Jhuna Chowdhury_
_General Secretary, Group Theatre Federation_

When I came to Bangladesh it was first time that I heard about acid attacks, so I was very scared by these happenings. The work of ASF is a very positive thing, and I hope it gets better and that in the future there will not be so many acid attacks.

_Ms. Karen Lueders._
_Member, ZDF German TV._
Monira Rahman receives Amnesty International Human Rights Award

For more than a decade, Monira Rahman has worked tirelessly in many ways for Bangladesh's destitute women and children. She has been fighting ceaselessly against all violence against women. In 1999, after seeing the suffering of acid victims, she decided to help them. Since her dearest wish is to prevent further faces from being burnt by acid.

She creates new dreams for acid survivors and is working tirelessly against potential perpetrators. Everyday, she faces the fact that men, women and children are being attacked on a daily basis. The past two years, the rates of attacks were twice as much as they are now.

On the 19th March 2006 “Amnesty International Germany” awarded Monira Rahman with the Human Rights Award 2005, at the German Theatre in Berlin. She was awarded for the efforts and struggle she faced to form Acid Survivors Foundation. Present at the ceremony were German president Horst Kohler while Amnesty International’s General Secretary Irene Khan gave a speech commending Monira Rahman. Monira Rahman says, the prestige is not just for herself, but for the whole of Acid Survivors Foundation and for all the acid attacked victims, as only they have experienced the pain of being attacked and they possess a lot of courage and patience to stand up against their attackers. Monira Rahman will award her prize money to Acid Survivors Foundation. Previous recipients of the award were Russian Human Rights worker Sevetlena Gannuschkina in 2003 and female Turkish Barrister Eren Keskin 2001.

Let's raise our hands to stop violence against women!

Irene Khan, Secretary General, Amnesty International

As a citizen of Bangladesh, I feel proud that Monira Rahman comes from my country.

As a woman, I feel privileged to pay tribute to a woman activist who has shown extraordinary courage, vision and leadership in defending the rights of women survivors of violence. And I am humbled by the extraordinary courage of Asma Akther and other women survivors of acid attacks.

Think of the courage of this young girl from a remote town in Bangladesh, think of the strength of spirit that she has, to rebuild her life with hope and optimism.
Monira and the Acid Survivors Foundation have exposed one of the most cowardly and cruel forms of violence against women in the world. Acid attacks disfigure, disable and blind women for life, destroying their chances of studying, working, marrying and leading a normal life. A moment's act by a man becomes a life-time's suffering for a woman, for no reason except that she has angered him or dared to stand up to him.

Unfortunately, what is happening in Bangladesh is just one part of a much bigger picture of violence against women which touches almost every corner of the world. According to one survey, one in three women in the world - an estimated one billion women - is a victim of serious violence or coerced sex. Violence against women takes many different forms, from the bedroom to the battlefield. It begins even before birth with sex-selective abortion, continues with female infanticide, abuse of young girls, female genital mutilation, rape and beatings by partners, sexual harassment at work, and trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation. In some parts of the world, women are killed by their own family in the name of honour. In some countries, brides are burnt to death because they have failed to bring a good dowry. In countries suffering from armed conflict, women and girls are raped as a part of a military strategy to terrorise, subjugate and uproot people. I have seen these women in Darfur, Sudan, in Goma and Kigali, DRC.

All these examples seem very remote to us, as we sit here in Berlin, in the heart of West Europe. But violence against women is not just a problem that happens over there. It also happens here. In Germany, as in other western countries, every day women are battered and beaten in their own homes. According to the Council of Europe, domestic violence is the major cause of death and disability for women in Europe between the ages of 16 and 44 years. It accounts for more deaths and injury than cancer or traffic accidents.

Why does violence against women happen?

Three major causes are impulsivity, inequality, and apathy.

First, impulsivity. In too many countries of the world, laws, policies and practices discriminate against women, denying them equality with men politically, economically and socially. That creates an environment in which women are treated with contempt, their voices are suppressed, and their rights are trampled. Such an environment breeds violence against women. Even in countries where the laws grant equality, social roles reinforce the power of man over women's lives and bodies. In many societies, religious practices, tradition and custom and tolerate and sometimes encourage violence against women.

Secondly, impulsivity. Violence against women happens because those who commit these crimes know that they can get away with it. Very often governments turn a blind eye to gender violence. 79 countries in the world have no laws on domestic violence, 127 countries have no laws against sexual harassment, only 16 countries have laws that specifically refer to sexual assault. Even in countries where there are laws, the police and the judiciary fail to apply them properly. Few perpetrators are brought to justice and even fewer convicted. Rape has the lowest conviction rate among serious crimes: worldwide it is only 10%.

In Bangladesh, those who commit acid attacks are rarely prosecuted and punished. Only one in ten perpetrators is brought to justice.

Thirdly, and most damningly, apathy. As a society we are too ready to find excuses for violence against women. We remain silent when we should be outraged. We talk a lot about the War on Terror but not enough about the war on women. Hundreds of women have been attacked with acid in Bangladesh. Nothing can be more visible than their injury. Nothing can be more shameful than the fact that it still continues to happen. There was universal outrage against racial apartheid in South Africa - yet we remain silent in the face of gender apartheid in Saudi Arabia which permits high levels of violence against women.
We turn a blind eye to the dangerous backlash of conservative and fundamentalist forces which are seeking to roll back women's human rights in many parts of the world. And when we see our family member, neighbors or our friend with bruises on her arms, our first thought is, why does she stay with him, when really we should be asking, why is he getting away with it?

But society's complacency is being challenged more and more, around the world by women activists and survivors. They are confronting governments; they are questioning social norms and the unequal status of women; they are demanding justice and an end to impunity. These women are working in difficult and dangerous circumstances, often at great personal risk. Monira Rahman is one of these brave women. She has challenged society's complacency. She has exposed injustice, and, even more importantly, she has given hope to the survivors.

Like Monira, we too in Amnesty International are determined to eradicate violence against women. That is why two years ago, Amnesty International launched a world-wide campaign to Stop Violence Against Women.

The key message of our campaign is that violence against women is a human rights abuse. Human rights are universal, and women and girls have the right, like everyone else, to be free from violence. Violence against women, whether in happens in prisons or private homes, is an issue of public concern and governments cannot turn a blind eye to it. They have the duty to take all reasonable measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish violence against women, even when the perpetrator is a private individual.

Together with women's groups around the world, Amnesty International's campaign challenges discriminatory laws, promotes women's human rights, fights impunity and seeks to change social attitudes.

As we pay tribute to Monira Rahman and Asma Akther, let us reaffirm our commitment to Stop Violence against Women. Let us challenge social and cultural attitudes that belittle women. Let us fight for women's human rights. Let us confront those in authority and demand change. Amnesty International's core value is international solidarity; human rights abuses anywhere must be the concern of people everywhere. We call on men as well as women around us to join the campaign to denounce and eradicate violence against women. Violence against women is widespread but it is not inevitable - it can and must be stopped. Yesterday impossibility is today's reality.

The logo of Amnesty International's campaign to stop violence against women is the hand - it is in our hands to make a difference. Let's make that pledge. Let's raise our hands to stop violence against women.

Award

ASF will recognize journalists who have reported on acid violence.

In 6th June, 2006 ASF will recognize national journalists who have reported on acid violence, between 2004-2005. The journalists will be awarded in four categories: Best Feature, Best Report, Best Photography and Best Electronic Reporting at Spectra Convention Centre.

All the winners will receive a cheque for 30,000 (Thirty Thousand) Taka, Certicate and a Crest.
Condolence Message for Nasreen Huq
For her untimely and unnatural death

Nasreen Huq is one of our founder trustees and active member involved in developing this organization and making it successful organization. We are deeply saddened by her untimely and unnatural death on 24 April following a car accident. She was tireless in promoting and protecting the rights of the women and children. She was uncompromising in promoting Zero tolerance on the issue of violence against Women. Her dream to reality! We announce that the ASF Media Award 2005 is dedicated in the name of Nasreen Huq for her outstanding work for the survivors of acid violence. We express our deep commiseration to her family and hope that they will be able to overcome this shock.

Board of Trustees
Acid Survivors Foundation

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