

VOICES

The Women's Center Newsletter

University of Connecticut

November 2001

Women Cannot Be Ignored During War

By Joy Pachla

After the horrific events of September 11, information on the Taliban became top news in the United States. Soon, the general population became aware of the shocking situation of women in Afghanistan.

However, the plight of Afghan women has been going on for over five years, and feminist groups, such as the Feminist Majority Foundation, have been tracking the Taliban's treatment of women since 1996.

Unfortunately, it took a national tragedy to bring attention to the violation of not only women's rights, but also human rights, in Afghanistan.

"We have been saying for years that a country where so many people have no rights will create international instability...how women are treated is a good indication of which way a society is going." Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority Foundation, said in a *Los Angeles Times* interview.

As in Afghanistan, the situation of women all over the world has been treated in the same way by the media. While feminist groups report on international atrocities against women every day, rarely do these reports make it into major newspapers or news programs.

Although the terrorism of Sept. 11 has brought to light the situation of Afghan women, there is concern that this issue will be ignored again as the world concerns itself with a war.

Jim Jeffords of Vermont, the only Independent member of the U.S. Senate, told *Women's ENews* "he is worried about how women and children will fare as the country deals with the current crisis of terrorism, anthrax fears and a faltering economy."

Jeffords said he plans on working to protect Social Security and important social programs, which women are the major beneficiaries of, as the nation looks to dip into reserves to pay for all that needs to be done.

The terrorist attacks have provided ammunition for those who seek to restrict the rights of women in the United States.

After the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Rev. Jerry Falwell blamed feminists, gays and lesbians, and abortionists for the attacks.

During the past few years, abortion clinics have received anthrax threats from anti-abortion extremist groups. After Sept. 11, the threats have only escalated. On Oct. 15, over 250 abortion clinics around the country received threatening letters claiming to contain anthrax. More recently, on Nov. 8, more than 200 abortion clinics, including clinics in Connecticut, were the targets of another widespread mailing. None of the powder-laced mailings have tested positive for anthrax.

Presidents of both the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Feminist Majority Foundation have called on the government to provide aid to the people of Afghanistan. Other feminists, such as Gloria Steinem and Jane Fonda, have signed petitions for massive airlifts of food and medicine to the Afghan people.

The Daily Campus, the student newspaper at UConn, reported that in a speech given at Eastern Connecticut University, on Nov. 8, Gloria Steinem said that if the government had listened to feminists twenty years ago, the present conflicts in Afghanistan involving the Taliban

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SNEAK PEEK

A Quick Guide to What's Inside

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Calendar of Events

November

16th: Cris Williamson in Concert

Before Melissa Etheridge, the Indigo Girls, and Ani DiFranco, there was Cris Williamson! Come spend an evening with Cris Williamson, one of the founders of women's music. Cris's landmark album "The Changer and the Changed," released in 1974, became a treasure to an entire generation of lesbians. Her work addresses a variety of human rights and environmental issues, along with the struggles inherent in intimate relationships. Co-sponsored by the Rainbow Center. Friday, 8 p.m., Jorgenson Gallery

27th: Women's Reproductive Rights Agenda - *Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?*

Join Andrea Hubbell, director of the film *The Roots of Roe*, Victoria Barrera, the Hispanic Health Council Board President and Debra McDonald, from Planned Parenthood, for a panel discussion on the history of Connecticut's reproductive movement, as well as the new reproductive rights agenda, with a focus on access for women of color, the "Global Gag Rule", and the Surgeon General's report on sexuality. Tuesday, 4 p.m., Dodd Center

Ongoing Groups

All groups are free and confidential and meet in the Women's Center Lounge

Between Women

Between Women is a rap group for women who love women... or think they might. Come and discuss fun topics, movies, and more, with women who share your feelings and experiences. This group is open to members of the University and its surrounding community. Every Wednesday, 7 p.m. For more information, please call 486-4738 or email betweenwomen@hotmail.com.

Sexual Assault Survivor's Group

A support group for women who have experienced actual or attempted sexual assault at any time. Co-sponsored with Mental Health Services. Contact Jen Fox at 6-4705 for information and registration.

Phenomenal Women Group

Fed up with all the messages saying you're not thin enough? Tired of feeling pressure to have the "perfect body"? Then come join us. For more information call Kathy Larocco at 486-4130. Sponsored by Counseling Services. Mondays, 4:30-5:30.

Women's Book Club

Come and explore the world through the eyes and words of women writers. Visit the "Groups" section of our website at www.womenscenter.uconn.edu to review past selections. We meet every other month. The next selection is "Daughter of Fortune" by Isabel Allende. Next meeting is Thursday, November 15th, at noon, at the Women's Center.

Kim Gandy, NOW President, Speaks at UConn

By Joy Pachla

Kim Gandy, the new president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), came to UConn to speak on issues of equity in women's health, during the last week in October. The event was sponsored by Allied Health and was part of UConn's Human Rights Semester.

As with many lectures and seminars that have occurred after Sept. 11, Gandy's presentation was affected by our nation's recent, tragic events. She talked about the problems concerning women as a result of Sept. 11, such as the Rev. Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson blaming feminists, gays and those who are pro-choice for the terrorist attacks and cuts to programs that benefit women and children.

The country's focus on the war on terrorism has provided an opportunity for some to promote their own agendas, while the general population stays preoccupied.

"This is the chance for some to push the programs they want while flying under the flag of national unity," Gandy said.

In looking for ways to pay for the war on terrorism, social programs such as, the Women, Infants and Children's Program, have been cut.

The NOW office has been on high alert for anthrax threats. However, receiving threats by mail is not something new for NOW.

"Our staff has been opening our mail with Latex gloves for two to three years now," Gandy said.

Before focusing on reproductive rights as her main subject, Gandy examined many other women's health issues, showing just how much needs to

be dealt with in this field.

Addressing violence against women, Gandy pointed to how our society teaches boys to disrespect girls with simple phrases like, "you throw like a girl." Boys are conditioned to think that being called a girl is a bad thing. They may become fearful of appearing feminine or may think they are superior to girls.

While many people have become recently aware of the plight of Afghan women, NOW has been tracking the inhumane treatment of Afghan women for over five years.

"Afghan women have had no health care for the last five years," Gandy said. "And one Afghan woman dies in childbirth every 30 seconds."

Gandy discussed the "global

gag rule," which President Bush revived as his first act in office. This act prevents any international clinic that provides abortions, refers abortions or even talks about abortion, from receiving U.S. funding for family planning.

Gandy was most passionate on the danger *Roe v. Wades* faces in possibly being overturned. There will be vacancies on the U.S. Supreme Court for the first time in seven years during President Bush's term, which could allow anti-abortion justices to fill the spots.

"My biggest fear is my daughter asking me, why did you have abortion rights and then lose them for me?" Gandy said.

The Women's Center held a reception for Gandy after her public presentation.

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might have been avoided. At the time, Steinem was a supporter of the Red Army, the Russian forces that were challenging the patriarchal Muslim society.

Feminist groups are also asking the government to include Afghan women in the rebuilding of Afghan society. Before the Taliban's takeover in 1996, Afghan women were 70 percent of the school teachers, 40 percent of the doctors and 50 percent of civilian government workers.

Feminist groups argue that without women involved in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, it will be impossible to reconstruct a peaceful society or end terrorism.

This notion has received support from Congresswomen Louise Slaughter (D-NY) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL). Both are calling for more funding to Afghan women's non-government organizations (NGO's), which will provide for health, education and relief services to Afghan women and children. They are also urging President Bush to encourage that any new government established in Afghanistan also include women as leaders and as full and active participants.

On the UConn campus, action is being taken to bring awareness to insults and attacks against Muslim, Middle Eastern and South Asian women in the United States. Members of Campus Safe, a group concerned with combating sexual assault on the UConn campus, wore hijabs in September to show support for women who experienced harassment.

Also, there have been numerous vigils for peace on the UConn campus and around the state. A peace protest in Hartford, Conn. resulted in numerous arrests and injuries when police went after protestors with clubs and pepper spray for "conspiracy to incite a riot."

Women's Center Welcomes New Associate Director

and ended up at the UConn Women's Center.

Last March, the UConn Women's Center welcomed Kathy Fluckiger, the Center's new Associate Director, to their staff.

Certainly the past seven months have been filled with excitement and change for Kathy. Not only is she a new employee, but she is also a new mother. Kathy gave birth to her daughter Kelly in May.

While attending school and working full-time, Kathy found time to volunteer for Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services. There she found what she loves to do—supporting and promoting women's rights and human rights.

"My passion is being an advocate," Kathy said. "My mission is to empower women, girls and all people."

As the community educator and volunteer coordinator at Northeastern Sexual Assault Crisis Center, Kathy helped volunteers find what they could do best.

"The best ways to find what you want to do is volunteer and do internships—especially non-traditional ones," Kathy said. "That's how I found what I do."

After graduating from Eastern Connecticut State University with a degree in psychology and sociology, Kathy decided to continue working with women's rights

As Associate Director, Kathy coordinates educational women's programs and supervises the student employees.

"Being a manager of students is different—a new challenge. But I absolutely love working with the students at the Center." Kathy hopes to extend some of her knowledge and passion on to others.

"It's important to open women up to opportunities that hadn't been considered before. We need to arm women with knowledge and make them aware of what support systems are available."

She sees the Women's Center as a support system where women and all individuals can be themselves.

"It's a safe haven for people to freely express themselves and a venue to grow and develop," Kathy said. "We should all be able to be different—we all have different abilities, we should all have the opportunity to try."

Coming to the Women's Center was anything but a challenging transition for Kathy, who felt at home immediately.

"I really feel I'm walking the right path in life," Kathy said.

What You Need to Know About Abortion

The Good News:

- Emergency contraception pills (ECPs), also known as "morning after pills," prevent pregnancy when taken within 72 hours of unprotected sex. They will not prevent pregnancy if a woman is already pregnant.
- Mifeprex, also known as RU 486, is a safe and effective option for terminating a pregnancy without surgery. The United States Food and Drug Administration approved Mifeprex after four years of testing.

The Bad News:

- President Bush might have the opportunity to replace at least one, if not more, of the Supreme Court justices. He has sighted Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas - the Court's two most virulent opponents of *Roe* - as his model justices. Just one more anti-choice justice could lead to the overturn of *Roe* and the end of legal abortion in the U.S.
- On Bush's second day in office, he issued an executive memorandum reinstating the global "gag"

rule on international family planning programs. The "gag" rule prevents U.S. funds from going to international programs that use their own non-U.S. funds for abortion services, counseling, and lobbying.

- Not enough women know about ECPs, and anti-choice politicians are working to deny women information about and access to ECPs.
- A recent Kaiser Family Foundation survey on the status of Mifeprex since FDA's approval found that despite its safety and effectiveness, doctors do not regularly prescribe it. Over half cited fear of violence as a reason.
- Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) are fake "clinics" generally run by anti-choice activists. CPCs provide misleading and often inaccurate information to women about reproductive health issues.
- Eighty-six percent of all U.S. counties and 95 percent of all rural U.S. counties have no abortion provider.
- There have been almost 2,400 reported instances of violence against providers since 1977, including seven murders and 16 attempted murders.

Announcements

Would a Care Givers Support Group Help You?

Are you responsible for an elderly parent? If you are involved in coordinating and managing the care of an elderly parent and would like to connect with others facing the same challenges, the Women's Center is coordinating a support group. The connection with others experiencing the same issues may help with coping, information sharing, venting and avoiding going down the wrong road with decisions that have to be made.

Communication will primarily be via email, with a possibility of coming together as determined by the group. To be included, please send your email to Kathleen at kathleen.holgerson@uconn.edu

Join Our Listserv!

Want to keep up with the Women's Center on a weekly basis? Then join the U-WOMEN Listserv, a weekly updated e-mail featuring Women's Center events, on and off campus events, announcements and national/international news. For information on how to subscribe, email joypachla@hotmail.com.

Donna Ferrato's Images of Battered Women Stir Deep Emotions

By Elizabeth Harrison

Donna Ferrato brought riveting and heart wrenching evidence against the suffering and brutality that is perpetrated behind closed doors across America. In her photo documentary, "When Love Hurts," she chronicles domestic violence through portraits of those who are or have been in abusive relationships. Ferrato preceded her program by drawing comparisons between the life of a battered woman and the lives that we are leading now as Americans who have experienced the horror of terrorism. We now know what it feels like to be living in fear and wondering when the next attack will come.

The aim of the night was to promote awareness about domestic violence. Ferrato has been documenting domestic violence for over 10 years by riding with police and volunteering at women's shelters. Her work began while she was on an assignment for a magazine to photograph a very successful couple, Garth and Lisa and their beautiful family. After a few months it was apparent to Ferrato that Garth was controlling the family with drugs and alcohol, as well as through mental, verbal, physical and sexual abuse. Since Ferrato had never been exposed to a situation like this, after she photographed a particularly violent episode between Garth and Lisa, she left. It wasn't until later that she was able to get the courage to become a champion for battered women and promote this serious social problem through her photos.

The pictures of women with hopeless looks and children clinging to their mother's brought tear to my eyes, but Ferrato's commentary made it more real by giving names and stories to their battered faces. To illustrate how deep the denial can run, she showed a photo of a woman who had been beaten and then run over by a truck. However, when she looked in the mirror at the hospital, she said, "it doesn't look that bad, does it?" Abused women need support and help to break the cycle of abuse. Ferrato is also a large advocate for men's education and the programs that are available for those who abuse. Throughout the show, it became very apparent that domestic violence knows no race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic boundaries, and in the case of an eight year old abuser, it also knows no age.

Ferrato also stressed the need for children's education, and the importance of the programs that are available for abusers. Children who come from abusive homes are more likely to end up in abusive relationships. Ferrato's show opened my eyes to the different horrors of domestic violence, but also to the steps that we all can take to be aware and provide help, support and change. The documentary is an asset to society just because there are people like Ferrato who are taking actions to make a difference in the lives of women in abusive relationships.

VOICES

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VOICES

THE WOMEN'S CENTER...WHERE ALL THE PIECES COME TOGETHER

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