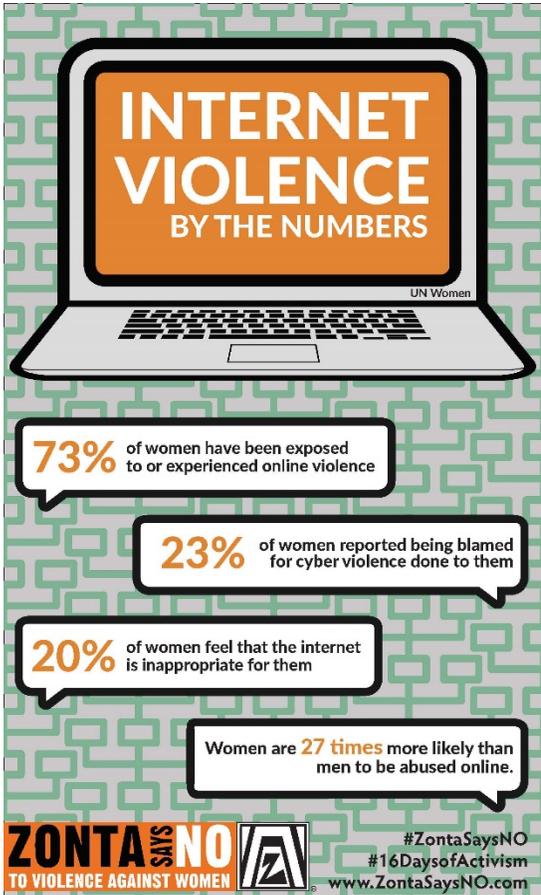




16 Days of Activism – Day 5

Say No to Cyber Violence

The increasing reach of the internet, the rapid spread of mobile information, and the widespread use of social media, coupled with the existing pandemic of violence against women and girls (VAWG), have led to the



emergence of cyber VAWG as a growing global problem with potentially significant economic and societal consequences. Research shows that one in three women will have experienced a form of violence in her lifetime, and despite the relatively new and growing phenomenon of internet connectivity, it is estimated that one in ten women have already experienced a form of cyber violence since the age of 15. Access to the internet is fast becoming a necessity for economic well-being and is increasingly viewed as a fundamental human right; therefore, it is crucial to ensure that this digital public space is a safe and empowering place for everyone, including women and girls. U.N. Women and the U.N. Broadband Commission estimate that 73% of women have endured cyber violence, and that women are 27 times more likely as men to be harassed online. In Europe, nine million girls have already experienced some kind of cyber violence by the time they were 15.

Experts warn us not to think of cyber violence as a separate phenomenon to real-world forms of violence. Women and girls who have experienced sexual harassment, stalking or violence from an intimate partner 'offline' are also often victims of 'online' violence from the same person. As with all types of violence, cyber violence affects the lives of victims tremendously and comes in many forms. Cyber stalking, for example, refers to a person repeatedly sending unwanted e-mails or text messages to their victims. Cyber harassment relates to offending a person online with unwanted sexually explicit messages, threats of violence or hate speech. One of the most disturbing forms of online violence is non-consensual

pornography, which former partners often commit. This means posting or distributing sexually graphic images or videos online without a person's permission. (Research suggests that up to 90 % of non-consensual pornography victims are women and the number of cases is rising.) There are various other forms of cyber VAWG, such as gender-based slurs and harassment, 'slut-shaming', 'sextortion', rape and death threats, 'doxing', and electronically enabled trafficking. Unfortunately, many cases of cyber violence are not reported to the police. In cases where victims do report the incidents, police and justice departments may not take it as seriously as real-life incidents of violence.

UN Women argues that "cyber touch is recognized as equally as harmful as physical touch," suggesting that online harassment might be just as lethal as domestic violence or sexual abuse. "Dead is dead," says Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General of the U.N. and Executive Director of U.N. Women. "Whether you are dead because your partner shot you or beat you up, or you killed yourself because you couldn't bear cyber-bullying, or you were exposed to many of the sites that lead people to suicide pacts—bottom line, we lose a life." According to UN Women, the three most important ways to combat cyber violence are sensitization to the dangers, safeguards against harassment, and sanctions against those who perpetuate internet abuse. "This is a 21st century challenge that needs us to have new ways of reacting," Mlambo-Ngcuka says. Still, only 26% of law enforcement agencies in the 86 countries surveyed are properly prepared to address the problem.

What can each of us do? INTERVENE – find a safe way to help when you see or hear about internet violence.

SAY NO TO VIOLENCE.

