

## ISSUES FOR REFORM

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### A. NATIONAL EDUCATION CAMPAIGN ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Witnesses from across the country expressed their dismay and frustration over the lack of societal recognition and understanding of violence against women. Patricia Marshall referred to the dearth of knowledge on this issue as a "national blind spot" that is a threat to the safety and security of women. This state of affairs is seen to be particularly disturbing given the historical and contemporary evidence showing that violence against women, perpetrated by trusted persons and strangers, has in fact existed for centuries. They advocated a national education campaign to put women's safety and security on the public agenda.

The Committee was told that documentation in the research literature show that the public perceives physical and sexual assaults against women to take place mainly among the uneducated and the poor and to be committed by deviant individuals. Unless grievous bodily injury results, these attacks on the person are not regarded as causing long-lasting harm to the victims, many of whom are seen to be the authors of their own victimization because they are too provocative, too sexy, too angry, or too imprudent. These attitudes deny the cross-class character of violence, minimize the effects of violence on the victim, blame the victim, excuse the abuser, and fail to give appropriate weight to the criminal nature of violence against women. Witnesses spoke of mass education as a potentially progressive force to dispel myths about violence and to advance awareness of public responsibility for its occurrence and its prevention.

Glenda Simms, The President of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, emphasized that violence against women works against the interests of all members of society:

"Violence against women is a women's issue, a men's issue, and it is society's issue. Massive change is needed to prevent violence in our society.... We must build on the growing awareness of and concern about violence against women. We must work for the equality of all women by working against the violence which keeps women fearful and robs us all of real dignity... Violence against women is morally wrong and it is never in the interests of our society to tolerate violence.  
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Witnesses recommended the establishment of a national education campaign that would stress societal responsibility for violence and its prevention. They pointed to the need to heighten the awareness of people, of all ages and from all sectors of society, that