

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS COLLOQUIUM

REMEMBRANCE AND REMEDY

OCTOBER 20, 2010

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA, 1126 SIXTEENTH STREET, N.W.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Dialogue on Diversity presented its 2010 Domestic Violence Awareness Colloquium, **REMEMBRANCE AND REMEDY**, on Wednesday, October 20 at the architecturally striking La Raza headquarters in downtown Washington. This second annual program formed part of the Domestic Violence Awareness Month observances around the country. Emphasis in the colloquium presentations centered on the acute incidence of domestic abuse among many immigrant communities in the national capital and other cities – reflecting a plague permeating, in its Protean forms, every class and ethnicity.

A program highlight was the appearance of HON. RAÚL YZAGUIRRE, long-time President of La Raza and now Ambassador to the Dominican Republic. In remarks opening program proceedings shortly after 12:00, Mr. Yzaguirre



understand the devastating consequences for the community – one evident imperative being clearly the tasks of parents in taking their responsibilities seriously. Bienvenidos.

begin with greeting his hearers: Buenos tardes. It is always a pleasure, he said, to welcome you to this building, which is for us and for many other organizations, a decent space, meant for all organizations of good will. He commended Dialogue on Diversity as organizer of the day's colloquium for its long history of work to afford a powerful forum, from which little, if anything, is put down as out of bounds in a free discussion of the social and civic realities of our society and our time. While discourse with no artificial constraints offers hope, our society, Mr. Yzaguirre observed, is sadly being torn apart at the same time by political infighting. So it is a society in which one has both chances and challenges. Very many Latino persons, scarcely now a minority in a swiftly developing society, find that violence, invading even home and hearth and family, is important part of our contemporary reality, and for all persons, men and women alike. It is in part an intergenerational problem, and there is need, Mr. Yzaguirre emphasized, to

LYNN ROSENTHAL, White House Advisor on Violence Against Women, upon her introduction by Master of Ceremonies Deborah Vargas, began by noting that many in today's audience who are on the front lines in the continuing struggle with the incidence of family violence, share with her a common background, since her own professional history of began with years of work in shelters and family clinics. We are here on behalf of those known and unknown. We are alive and we are at work, she reminded hearers. Some others live in terror, and some have died. We must celebrate the survivors and take up the challenge in moving forward. She noted the commitment of the Administration at its highest levels to the cause. Her own work is part of the office of the Vice President, who, she noted, holds you as his "heroes". Shelters and hot lines are the stuff of the battle; they are held together at grass roots by the efforts of ordinary people, the commitment of the tireless few who are passionately dedicated to the cause. They have backing in a new vigor in Federal policy. Dialogue on Diversity, she observed, stands as a "key group" in moving the agenda forward. Reports plentifully document the alarming frequency of attacks and incidents of all kinds week by week, and the state of affairs is little different if one observe the conditions at any point around the world – the bane extends to every square centimeter of the terrestrial globe. Some years ago it was the Vice President, then a Senator, who held hearings bringing to plain public view the lurid testimonies of survivors. The outrage rising about the country brought forth the 1994 Violence Against Women Act. This legislation was a new departure for the campaign against family abuse. The Act imparted a new energy, prompting everyone to strive together. New relationships were then established. Ms. Rosenthal had then managed a shelter in Florida, where the Governor's office had received one of the first of the grants. How to respond to these evils? She soon found herself talking with (sometimes startled!) police officials and others who had not viewed themselves previously as stakeholders in the situation. She learned their values and languages and world-views — and they hers. Congress has strengthened the act from time to time, extending its reach to afford protections, since enlarged, for training, for victims' housing, for state enforcement, for culturally fine-tuned approaches, and more. Incidents of domestic violence have dropped markedly, but the battle is



not won. Public attitudes are still infected by sexism, blame-the-victim reflexes, and the like. And still hot lines are ringing. The President has taken a hand in the cause. At a recent bill-signing ceremony a young woman began to relate her narrative of domestic woes. In the middle of the recital she simply broke down. The President hurried from offstage, where he was awaiting his own slot on the agenda, and stood at her elbow, encouraging her, as she finished her story. "He got me through this," she said afterward.

RODRIGO LEIVA, head of the Latino Federation of Greater Washington, noted that his organization was now partnering with Dialogue on Diversity for a second year in this program, which has now drawn force from the generous participation of such figures as Ambassador Yzaguirre and Ms. Rosenthal. We have learned in the Latino Federation, Mr. Leiva remarked, that violence begets violence. The self-report incidents are so high that as one is recorded, a second is coming in on its heels. The Federation is working to gain funding for services targeting domestic abuse. Funds come in large measure from the Federal government, but also from foundations. Education initiatives at High School and College levels are an important part of the task, as is the work of educating communities generally so that they acknowledge such violence to be "unacceptable behavior". It ought to be eradicated, one should expect, in our lifetime".



FRANCES ASHE-GOINS, Assistant Secretary for Women's Health at HHS, remarked at the outset that usually programs of this kind are populated only by women; it is good, therefore, to be on hand when, as today, a contingent of men



are present as well. The Women's Health Office works as a coordinating entity for HHS with NIH, the Center for Disease Control, and other agencies, not to mention its liaison functions with DOJ and the White House. Also recurring to her forty years' experience as a nurse, some of the time in ER duties, she is used to wading into emergencies and devising an immediate and serviceable remedy. Many patients, she has learned, want just to have somebody to talk to — some willing hearer to harken to the subject's tales of woe. The initial service provider, it may well be, appears the only place to reach out for help, when the alternative is a devastating silence. Often the health-care provider is the first of the persons victims will have the chance to speak with. Our specific topic is the impacts of domestic abuse, direct and indirect, on the universe of other medical conditions. Most obvious is the immediate trauma — contusions, fractures, etc — but that trauma contributes to chronic conditions, among these: depression, substance abuse, STD (incl. HIV). And diabetes — what is the connection? Violence can put you over the

boundary through hypertension, stress, and then some. There are yet other problems, somewhat shocking: For example, strangulation, according to studies on this phenomenon, forces decreased circulation to the brain, the dear cause of reduced function, otherwise known as stroke! Arthritis, body parts broken and not fixed — often hairline fractures. Chronic pelvic pain from violent, forced sexual encounters. The sheer neurological harm from being slammed about. It is necessary to speak very practically, because that is where the rubber meets the road. Alarming consequences are multiplied when a child is on the way, to be brought into the world with low birth weight, infections, and other pre-natal harms. Suicide and substance abuse are not far away. Low-income pre-school children have seen one or more incidents of some physical harms, and cognizable mental disturbance follows, along with heightened incidence of allergies, asthma, and compromise of immune system. The point to remember: there are dire ramifications beyond what one can readily see.

LYNEA WOODY, speaking for the District of Columbia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (DCCADV), described the coalition — a membership agency, tasked with oversight and encouragement of an army of workers from civil society organizations, religious groups, and others in laboring through the painful tangle of anguish and injury arising from familial conflicts that have gone from argument to blows. The DCCADV Executive Director, Ma. Karma Kottman, was also on hand. The "domestic violence community" has its marching orders in the circumstances of family conflict in this metropolitan area as in every other locale in the country. DCCADV has distributed small purple ribbon pins to attendees marking the observance of domestic violence awareness. The coalition seeks, among many other goals, reliable measures of the incidence and kinds of domestic violence. In 2009, for example, how many persons were killed? In the city? Countable evils in the course of one year. Some 31 thousand hot-line calls came in over that bounded time period. At the least persons of good will ought to stand together and have a powerful, because united, voice.

ANNE M. GARCIA, heading the Corazon project of Women Empowered Against Violence, Inc.[WEAVE], set about explicating the destructive mechanisms of social relations among young persons gone awry. The WEAVE organization, first of all, provides services over a broad range of legal (divorce, immigration matters, etc), economic, and psychological difficulties experienced by immigrants, some with documents, some without. Counseling is offered,

with free therapy, individual and group, and some special programs at a side office outside downtown Washington. A disquieting scenario about teens with features specific to the Latino community, drawn from real cases that come



through the office every day: Girl from El Salvador at age 12. One year later a young man enters, an older student, also of Salvadorean family, but born in the U.S. He buys her gifts, helps with homework, tutors her in English. He took her to parties. Before long, however, he began to display jealousy of other young gentlemen imagined to be contesting for her affections. He came to be intrusive, and was soon calling or texting (stalking in the high-tech, 21st century style) 30 times a day. He, with his friends, began following her everywhere. She was urged to cut loose from other girls. Compliant, she spent all her time with him (and his friends) — she had dropped any friends of her own. She learns that she will have a child. He punches her, shoves her, ridicules her. He apologizes and says: never again. She tried to hide the situation; when the family found out she was thrown out of her house. The child was born. The consort would shout and scold, sometimes shaking the baby to quiet it. The girl was afraid. He knocked her down, kicked. She could not run. He said: if she left, he would report her

undocumented status and that of her family. Threatened to beat up the girl and her relations. The girl nevertheless still maintains a form of love for her abuser. The counselor must be entirely sympathetic when the patient confides. The ambiguities of feelings; the counselor must not be censorious. The abuser appears often to have little idea of the consequences of such violence — they are surprised at being hauled into the police offices and the courts. There is all too little instruction for persons of that age — specifically the potential abusers themselves. Some counseling services require that parents or others come along for services (as in this case, with a hostile, unsympathetic family, a dangerous, perhaps impracticable task). Girls are better advised to ring up someone and bring them along, a someone that you can trust. This has much to do with dangers of the culture. Clients must be assured that the counseling service stands ready to help even though they have no documents.



Claudia Campos and Rocio Watson

CLAUDIA CAMPOS, a writer and radio host and expert on the psychology of sex and family relationships, spoke next. Her topic was the relationship of substance abuse and domestic violence. The connections and the strands of causation are complicated and highly nuanced from case to case. It is dear enough that causation can run in both directions, abuse to substance usage, and alcohol and drug usage to abusive, violent behaviors. One can not say as a general rule that alcohol, for example, impels one to domestic violence — experience indicates that many men do quite well with no more than prods from their own psyches. What can one do? Images of love as a thing of romance can, if not reasonably tethered, lead to assaults and griefs, suggesting to young

women readers or viewers a submissive stance. The telenovelas are the blood descendents of the sixteenth century novels of the Cavalleria, which, with their romantic heroes, form a powerful strain in the history of Spanish literature. Whatever else one may say, however, they are in fact fun; but they can easily turn into snares of deceit. Men come to suppose they enjoy the right to manage (“controlar”) the women of their circle. For this, the story goes, they are created. To all this we have to advance a contrary ideal, that of sobriety and individual responsibility.

ROCIO WATSON, newly appointed as Executive Director of AYUDA, discussed in detail the psychological and economic barriers facing the abuse victim when you try to make it on your own. Ms. Watson was born in Guadalajara, Mexico and is thus sensitized to the travails of immigrants. Among legal services needed by AYUDA’s clients, immigration services are crucial for families. Early in her career, working as an intern in a California prosecutor’s office, she had encountered cases of child neglect and abuse, most of the victims from the Latino community, and at the center of the troubles was the incidence of domestic violence. When those involved and those observing were undocumented, they were equally afraid to report. Her personal mission was formed by a growing persuasion that regardless of the immigration fears, each child deserves a mother or father for protection. That perspective runs at cross-purposes to the anguishing fact that generations-long cycles of violence often undermine the resources that might give children that sense of what a comfortable family is like. We should ideally engender havens of leisure and contemplativeness. As it is, families are scared to report the rot of abuse and the fear is shared by the children. When someone else calls the police or a child talks at school, the sad story is often repeated: the abuser, who is seized, is as likely as not the only one documented and the only one economically viable. Five kids and an economically helpless mother. Things may be safe for a few days. But then what happens?. Whose voice does one hear? I know these voices: when we speak from the outside on behalf of survivors we must understand, if we are to be of much help, what it is like from the inside. Soon after the victim’s arrival at Ayuda, she is interviewed by the lawyer. An abuse

relationship found – typically, he to police custody, she sometimes to the hospital, sometimes to a hotel. But – how can one get her into a hotel? No, they brusquely say. That is not the way we do business. She must, in the event, go through a very difficult chain of bureaucracies, waiting many days to get a bed to sleep in. Is there a Soc. Sec. number? Multiple, and repeated, inquiries fill the days. We thus have much work to do. There is wanting an effective mechanism to fashion a platform of support. These people are spunky. What they know of life is about caring for a child, with no sense that domestic violence is anomalous or aberrant. They are used to taking tribulations as a matter of course. We must not discourage them, but instead create mechanisms so that they have an immediate structure of support. We need to help them with the immigration case, etc., but what of the immediate shelter? At best we should have one telephone number for one stop – all services access. Not groping for answers, searching on an ad hoc basis every time a new person in need comes into the office.

SABRINA BALGAMWALLA, a young, resourceful lawyer with The Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center, works with persons from a daunting range of the Asian locales, ranging from the Pacific islands to the Middle East. She



herself a Muslim of South Asian heritage, her job daily brings her encounters with an immense variety of cultures and languages. Translators are needed. With such variety, the counselor or the lawyer has to tie into each case as a newly minted problem brought forward by a fresh, unique individual. But indeed some things do reappear with cognizable frequency. How does it inform our understanding? How is this experienced in the life cycle? In many places in the world, even in earliest childhood, girls have supper last, the boys first – thus a running start on lifetime malnutrition. Then the teen experiences, often in extended families, each cultural subdivision with its certain oddities, each with its peculiar structure of abuse. Then to the time of old age and its debilities, and here elder abuse comes to be observed. From certain sites the survivors carry the marks of refugee camps, and of injuries at the hands of other inmates or soldiers or guards. This is the quite horrid background of their instant problems. How do experiences shape identity

and culture? While the legal system is supposed to protect survivors and targets of abuse, in fact the community members are afraid of the police; in the courts it is often a question of who gets to the clerk and the judges first. Abuse targets suffer intimidation as the legal system itself can become an extension of the abuse. The lawyer learns to understand this cruel, even perverse side of the law. The legal remedy is often the fount and origin of evils. If the abuser is removed from the scene, where does one then go for shelter? Whatever the origins of particular abusive practices, one is often faced with the abuser's earnestly felt rationale, however perverse and odious, for the crime. That is, one is faced with the problem: does culture justify its own offensive practices even when they doak such outlying acts. When does a universal moral standard overbear the deepest canons of a culture? The lawyer as philosopher – another job in the lawyer's crowded portfolio.



ELISHEBA GOLDHABER, a 2010 intern now on the Dialogue on Diversity staff, and herself a lawyer in the State of Chiapas, Mexico, set out the empirical data, screen after screen tellingly delineating domestic abuse incidence throughout Latin America. Her highly detailed marshaling of factual data showing the contours of the problem in its Western Hemisphere setting underlined the universality of the challenge and at once suggested the particularity of the patterns of abuse, in the varieties of abusive behaviors and their frequency, country by country throughout the continent. A summary of her findings appears on Dialogue on Diversity's internet site for reference.



An insightful discussion of the policy implications of the stories of suffering and of efforts initiated for repair of harmed bodies and lives, was offered by DR. JULEY FULCHER, Director for policy Programs at Break the Cycle, an organization founded in its Washington incarnation by Dr. Fulcher herself nearly a decade ago and aiming chiefly at the disordered impulses that – all too often – turn social relationships into hellish ordeals for teens and young adults. Her work over some twenty years has included stints in a goodly variety of civil society posts, the practice of law, and advisory projects with the Congress and executive agencies in the public sphere. Interestingly, she undertook a study in Japan in 2002, observing and analyzing the modes of interaction of public- and private-sector programs operating to combat the incidence of domestic violence in localities in that country. Dr. Fulcher holds both a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and a law degree from Georgetown. With deep learning in the law and in the complexities of social interactions, she has taken in hand the task of working out



conceptions of policy that fit the legal and social facts of our general coming of age, as individuals and as a social organism.

The final speaker on the Colloquium agenda was MANUELA MCDONOUGH, Program Manager for Health, National Council of La Raza, who specially concluded the agenda on behalf of the NCLR, the Dialogue's host for the day, discussing the activities of the La Raza organization itself, inclusive of its influential public policy initiatives, in the response to the prevalence of domestic violence throughout the Latino communities in the U.S. and Latin America, and the relationship of these concerns with the general problem of maintaining a general state of health in these communities.

Acting as Co-Sponsor for the 2010 Colloquium was Mary's Center. Among collaborating organizations were the Latino Federation of Greater Washington, Vida Senior Centers, and the District of Columbia Office of Latino Affairs. Washington Hispanic and Capital Wire PR were Colloquium Media Partners. Translators from the District of Columbia's Office of Latino Affairs, with aid of Hearsay Interpreting, afforded simultaneous translation of proceedings in both English and Spanish.

Recommendations, for civil society, individual households, and for public policy, drawn from the presentations and discussions that were part of Dialogue on Diversity's second annual Domestic Violence Awareness Colloquium.

- Parental responsibilities must be more sharply felt as families instruct children in proper conduct.
- All elements of the community must be made to realize they are stakeholders in the problem and the cure for domestic violence.
- Education at high school and college levels (and earlier) must be directed to both potential targets of abuse and potential abusers, defining the rights and wrongs of teen social relationships, and flagging the probable psychological and medical consequences and the legal consequences of abusive conduct.
- Young people should be counseled that an excessively naïve and romantic view of social relationships can be a dangerous and treacherous path, and that sobriety and responsibility are the necessary habits for successful navigation of the dangerous waters of the teen years and young adulthood.
- Civil society groups (perhaps with public policy support and facilitation) should evolve a system of central access to the variety of services needed to make abuse victims self-sustaining – temporary and permanent housing, employment, training and rehabilitation, medical and psychological treatment, legal aid, etc. – an effective one-stop all-services information-and-brokering agent. (supplanting what is often an ad-hoc process of search for resources in each case)
- Lawyers, psychologists, and policy-makers must define the boundaries between culturally divergent manners and practices and what is unacceptable under overriding moral canons.
- Domestic Violence concerns should be rendered a constant preoccupation of legislatures, federal and state, with formal committees and less formal caucuses focusing sharply on the current developments and current problems in this field.
- Immigration laws should be amended to provide continuing benefits under the law to family members in the event of death, divorce, or legal disabilities of a family member primarily possessing such benefits (e.g., H1 Visa status), and to allow discretionary relief in the event of domestic abuse in a deportation case when the prospective abusing deportee is a necessary family resource for economic or other reasons.