



# DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY

PRESS ADVISORY

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October 26, 2009

## DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY PARTNERS WITH LATINO FEDERATION IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS COLLOQUIUM

October 23rd saw a gathering of non-profit and public sector experts in the persistent problem of domestic violence as they initiated a carefully focused conversation on the causes, strategies for prevention, and remedies for the harms of an endemic plague of domestic abuse, crossing every line of class, ethnicity, and geography. Speakers and an audience of professionals and concerned metro area friends of Dialogue on Diversity came together at the South Gallery of the former embassy building at 2437 Fifteenth Street, N.W., across from Meridian Hill Park, an edifice now serving as offices for a number of non-profit social service organizations and the locale for seminars and colloquia such as October 23's on the domestic abuse issue. The program, projected as an observance of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, was jointly undertaken by Dialogue on Diversity and the Latino Federation of Greater Washington. Attending guests were welcomed by Ma. Cristina Caballero of the Dialogue and Rodrigo Leiva, Executive Director of the Federation.

Rosie Hidalgo, policy chief of Casa de Esperanza, was lead-off panelist. Ms. Hidalgo, a lawyer and walking compendium of learning on the broad and often elusive topic of domestic abuse – the law, the organizations and personalities in the anti-DV movement, and the nexus of poverty, fear, threatened homelessness, cross currents of love and hate splitting families down the middle, all that intensifies the pain the abused family member labors under. Her sketch of the remedy is, on the one hand, to bring into play the tools afforded by present law to protect the abused persons, to marshal the resources of public and private-sector assistance with the basic necessities in each case; while, in a larger perspective, advocating a much more concentrated and resource-heavy campaign on the public side to pick up the pieces of social wreckage, to prevent abuse, by intervention where expedient at early stages, and otherwise to organize preventive and curative services on a scale matching the extent and gravity of the phenomenon.

Tabitha Joyner and Chaitra Shenoy teamed to tell the story of Break the Cycle, an organization wading bravely into the emotionally charged realm of teen-age romance and the many degrees and kinds of abusive conduct that the immaturity of the subjects appears with dismaying regularity to invite – the effect being to poison the matrix of relationships with the other sex that ought to be a valuable part of growing to adulthood, often leading to grave mental damage and even suicide. Their efforts target schools and student leadership, teachers and parents, and individual young persons, seeking to sharpen understanding of what often is little more than a vague uneasiness in the face of these problems. Ms. Shenoy in particular examines curricula of the schools, especially in their courses touching on family and interpersonal relationships, to suggest appropriate materials on the problems of teen sexual abuse.

Khaliun Chinbat of the Domestic Violence Resource Project outlined the range of her tasks, that of hearing attentively the complaints of sufferers from domestic violence, mental and physical, often persons who are little willing to discuss the facts of their suffering, in the communities classified under the rubric of Asian and Pacific Islander – a broad and clearly daunting range of cultures and languages. Ms. Chinbat has lived a multicultural existence from childhood on and is gifted with a special degree of empathy in grasping the nuances of the cultural and psychological circumstances of each of the clients she must aid. She herself, in her personal history, has had to learn, not only the native Mongolian idiom, but also Russian and German, along with her very efficient command of English.

The final panelist, Yarrow, comes to the question of the evening from a totally different perspective – not that of the scientist or even the social worker or lawyer, seeing the problems of others from the outside, but as one who has experienced the pain from the inside. Yarrow grew up on a farm in

Pennsylvania; she is now an entrepreneur with a string of successes to her name, and a writer and speaker on entrepreneurship techniques and the attitudes that can bring success in that realm of achievement. But for her the route led through the testing by fire of an abusive family relationship, which she bravely detailed for the persons on hand for the Colloquium. Not only was her situation stressed by doubts whether the train of painful, increasingly frequent incidents might indeed be her own fault, and whether it was right not to go on forgiving and suffering, whether her love for the family was to be a bar to her leaving the scene of abuse; but also she faced the terribly practical questions: where was she to get the money to exist on the outside of the family home. Where would she be housed. Could she get employment to support her choice. Her conclusion: the abused person must be absolutely realistic and frank about the possibilities; must enlist a cluster of friends to backstop the decision to leave, and must project a practicable plan for self-sustaining long-term living arrangements. The lively and profoundly constructive discussion that followed illuminated each of these quandaries from the experience and expertise of the panelists and many of the professionals in the audience. Ms. Hidalgo emphasized, for example, that the problems of the abused family members are a texture of very many interdependent necessities, and professional aid is in many cases indispensable if these are to be coordinated in a viable way.

Mr. John Trasviña, Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at HUD, joining other professionals for the Colloquium, noted that his office at HUD was soon to be part of a council for assessing the needs of domestic violence victims in all the aspects of housing. In further discussion, spurred by remarks of Colloquium Convenor Ma. Cristina Caballero of the Dialogue, who reported that while Congressional Caucuses have been formed (there are at this moment a total of 235 “caucuses”) for the most recondite and “niche” issues, no Domestic Violence Caucus exists – participants concluded that the problems might be brought more effectively to the attention of policy-makers if interested House members were in fact to come together as a Caucus on this issue.

The conclusion shared among most of the expert group in informal discussion was that progress was lamentably wanting in American public agencies and in the society generally on a number of matters crying out for action: in engineering serious change in the warnings concerning domestic abuse, in systematically identifying the incidence of the practice, in educating abuse targets on their options for redress, and, perhaps most of all, in ensuring the specially ample “safety net” of support and resources needed for those who are about to break loose from an abusive situation to exist, perhaps indefinitely, on their own. Speakers saw a bright spot in that religious organizations, which have often ignored abusive practices, or counseled victims simply to forgive and stick, for example, with a dangerous marriage, have in great measure come around to viewing the problem as both grave and susceptible of amelioration in a variety of respects, and have undertaken to provide a large part of that support safety net that victims urgently need. It was the shared sentiment that those present might form the nucleus of a sort of task force to urge formation of a Congressional Caucus on the subject and to advocate, pointedly and effectively, reform of institutions and the laws to provide a more humane outlook for sufferers of cruelties that lie just under the surface in many households across class and ethnic lines in world societies.

Names and internet addresses for the participating organizations are available at the Dialogue on Diversity Internet site; [www.dialogueondiversity.org](http://www.dialogueondiversity.org).

**ABOUT DIALOGUE ON DIVERSITY:** Founded in 1991, Dialogue on Diversity is a international network of women entrepreneurs, actively promoting constructive dialogue among Latino and other ethnic and cultural communities, with especial emphasis on their economic viability through entrepreneurship. America’s minority entrepreneurs are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. economy. They promise to be the backbone of American economic strength in the 21st Century. Dialogue on Diversity’s cycle of Public Policy and Entrepreneurship programs both celebrate and advance that promise.

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