

**Keynote Address on the occasion of the Official Opening of 16 Days of
Activism against Gender-Based Violence**

Ann-Marie Williams

Battlefield Park @ 4:00P.M.

Nov. 25, 2015

Today marks the start of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

Belize's theme: *Step up to End Gender-Based Violence Now!* Yet many women's have not been able to enjoy the full complement of their rights because their lives ended during this time... and what makes it worst is because their lives have been cut short by someone who professed to have loved them.

Today, I want to remember two young women whose names have long faded or better yet, disappeared from the nightly news headlines. Lory Wagner who in her early 20s was killed almost a dozen years ago, when her visiting boyfriend told police he was cleaning the gun and it went off and then there's Monique Emmanuel at 23 when her jealous boyfriend stabbed her to death.

How many times have you seen a man aggressing a woman in public and you turn a blind eye because it's none of your business. I'm here today to tell you it's your business. You can at least call the police if you are fearful. How many times as

parents we know that our daughters are being abused and we tell them to suck it up, how many times we know of other family members who are being abused and we keep it a secret...well it's no secret for when the neighbours know ...we all know.

As a society we all have a part to play to end GBV now! Not when the children are grown, not when you move away, not only when you have captive congregants at church services or when the abuser finds another victim.

Aware that both gender-based and domestic violence are crimes against the state, government must exercise a ZERO tolerance approach to violence against women and girls in light of Belize's ratification, of the *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women "Convention of Belem Do Para"*. *Belize ratified that convention 19 years ago today (Nov. 25, 1996).*

The Convention states that violence against women is any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere.

16-Days was initiated in 1991 and co-ordinated by the Center for Women's Global Leadership. 24 years later, Participation in the Campaign has seen close to 6,000 organizations, policymakers, governments, UN agencies, schools and countless individuals from over 180 countries worldwide.

From 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day, the [16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign](#) should be seen as a rallying cry to end violence against women and girls here at home.

This year marks the 20-year anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the most progressive road map to gender equality. World leaders met in March at the United Nations [59th Commission on the Status of Women](#) and in September at the [70th General Assembly](#) to take stock of the progress made and recommitted themselves to take meaningful action to close the gaps that are holding women and girls back. This year, a new [Sustainable Development agenda](#), which scales up the Millennium Development Goals for the first time includes specific targets and indicators on ending violence against women.

All these policy directions are all well and good but I submit that as parents (men and women) it begins with us. It is imperative that we take a conscious look at the way we socialize our girls and boys-take the time to teach them respect for each other, take the time to REINFORCE that neither one is more important, THAT A YOUNG MAN SHOULD SEE A YOUNG WOMAN AS HIS EQUAL AND VICE VERSA because strong familial values are the building blocks for strong

nation values...then and only then will Belize as a nation STEP UP TO END
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE and let us do it NOW!

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