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## **Zonta Observes 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence**

November 25 marked the beginning of "16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence," an initiative by Zonta International. It was designed to raise awareness of gender violence and its consequences, with a central theme that portrays women's rights as human rights; they cannot be separated. The concept for such a campaign originated at the first Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991, sponsored by the Center for Women's Global Leadership.

The campaign runs through December 10. The timing was chosen because it encompasses several dates of importance to women's rights, beginning with November 25 which is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and ending on December 10, the anniversary of International Human Rights Day. This was when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948, giving legitimacy to activists around the world who were calling for universal human rights. This document was one of the first major achievements of the United Nations and provided the basic philosophy for many legally binding international instruments to follow.

Although significant progress has been made, gender violence is still one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It knows no national, ethnic, religious or economic boundaries. It can take the form of prenatal sex selection, female infanticide, genital mutilation, sexual harassment, honor killings, domestic violence, marital rape, forced prostitution, and human trafficking. Research shows that one of every three women will suffer some form of violence in her lifetime. Half of the women who are

victims of homicide are killed by their current or former partners. Each year, more than 2 million girls between the ages of 5 and 15 are trafficked, sold or coerced into prostitution.

These numbers are shocking in today's world.

The mission of Zonta is to improve the lives of women locally, nationally, and internationally. While the Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva has project service teams and partnerships that help the club impact women's lives in many areas, the one that is most directly related to reducing gender violence is the Anti-Human Trafficking team. This team has partnered with HTAP (Human Trafficking Awareness Partnerships) and GRACE (Guatemalan Rural Adult and Children's Education). HTAP has been instrumental in educating the police, public agencies, and the public about human trafficking and how to identify and report it. The GRACE program has focused on improving women's lives in Huehuetenango, Guatemala by providing education and leadership training. Zonta's belief is that if women are empowered through education and economic support, they are less likely to be sold or coerced into slavery.

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Illustrations in separate e-mail:

Graphics: 1) Logo: 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence

2) Zontian Nola Theiss, also executive director of HTAP, facilitates a training seminar