

Kuan Yin: She who harkens to the cries of the world and restores equilibrium

By Rene Wadlow

*Wise in using skilful means
In every corner of the world
She manifests her countless forms
A Plea to Kuan Yin, Goddess of Mercy,
for compassion for Women Subject to Violence.*

March 8, 2018, the International Day of Women is an appropriate time to focus on



the destructive impact of violence on women. Violence *against women* is a year-round occurrence and continues at an alarming degree. Violence against women is an attack upon their bodily integrity and their dignity. We need to place an emphasis on the universality of violence against women, the multiplicity of its forms, and the ways in which violence, discrimination against women, and the broader system of domination based on subordination and inequality are inter-related.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by governments in the General Assembly of 1993, gives a broad definition of violence as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private

life.” The Declaration highlights violence within the family, violence within the broader community, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State. We will deal briefly with these three areas of violence against women.



The Family: Although the family should be a safe haven with relations among its members guided by respect and love, it is often within the family where the most psychologically devastating forms of violence take place – devastating because such violence goes against the expectations of a safe and harmonious haven. We see battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women and violence related to exploitation carried out by family members and intimate partners.

Within this family setting, we also need to look at the conditions of domestic workers, often working under totally unregulated conditions. Live-in maids can be subjected to slave-like treatment at the hands of the members of the family employing them. They can encounter humiliation, work and sexual exploitation and violence, often with no access to justice.

The Wider Community: As the preamble to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states clearly, “Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and to discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.” This universal phenomenon is embedded in a patriarchal structure which justifies mechanisms of enforcing and sustaining the system of domination.

As Adrienne Rich wrote in *Of Women Born*, “Patriarchy is the power of the fathers; a familial-social ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male. It does not necessarily imply that no woman has power or that all women in a given culture may not have certain powers... The power of the fathers has been difficult to grasp because it permeates everything, even the language in which we try to describe it. It is diffuse and concrete; symbolic and literal; universal, and expressed with local variations which obscure its universality.”

Many of the tenets of patriarchal gender order concerns male power to control women’s sexuality and reproductive capacity. The honour and prestige of a man, in many instances, are intrinsically associated with the conduct of a woman related to sexuality, leading in some cases to ‘crimes committed in the name of honour’.

Within the wider community, we also see physical, sexual and psychological violence, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and intimidation at work and in educational institutions, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

Education, psychological care and sociological change are important to combat violence within the family and the community.

The State and Armed Insurgencies: There is physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State. The State has a clear duty to control the behaviour of its police, prison, and other agents of justice. Victims of violence by the agents of the State should have clearly set out mechanisms by which they can appeal to the State for redress and compensation. Violence against women in custodial and prison conditions is still a widespread phenomenon which requires a review of national legislation but especially a real investigation of national practice. In many ways 'law and order' can be a 'war on the poor' and the misfits or a 'war of segregation' which can translate into arrests of members of specific social, ethnic or religious groups.

We see violence against women used as a systematic weapon in many armed conflicts by both governmental forces and the armed insurgencies. Women, children and the elderly are the most vulnerable in war-torn societies.

There are also real but less visible psychological and personality disorders left by a conflict. Therefore, the role and needs of women in post-war reconstruction and reconciliation require immediate special attention.

Thus, the Association of World Citizens stresses that we need to look carefully at the causes of violence against women and to develop further the policies and institutions leading to human dignity and respect.

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