

**REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE ON VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN SUSAN B. CARBON AT WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS  
DAY EVENT**

June 15, 2010 ~ Anaheim, Calif.

Thank you to all of our presenters, and everyone in the audience for being here today to commemorate World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. As Mala mentioned, this is the first year that the Department has formally recognized this international event— and now our national efforts are even bicoastal.

I want to say a few words about the work of my Office, the Office on Violence Against Women, and our priorities, especially in working to enhance the safety of older populations and equipping communities to respond to this vulnerable group.

Before I go on, I would like to acknowledge Janice Green, our office's senior program specialist, for bringing her profound understanding and commitment to this program. She has single-handedly transformed the program, and without her, we would not be where we are today. Janice has a great appreciation for all of you—who do this work tirelessly and is continually telling us how proud she is to be working by your side. It is a privilege to work with her, as you can well imagine.

Today, the Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services jointly recognize and join advocates around the world to commemorate the fifth annual World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

This day, first celebrated in 2005, is organized by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse in support of the United Nations' International Plan of Action on Aging.

Sexual assault and domestic violence are human rights issues.

In my 20 years of experience of being a judge and later a supervisory family court judge in New Hampshire, I heard, first-hand, countless cases of families that were torn apart by violence, and of survivors who experienced sexual violence that defied the very being of our humanity.

I also heard from survivors in my work outside of the courtroom, and in particular while I served on the Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence and chaired the Public Education Subcommittee in 1995.

As we convened public hearings around the state, advocates were concerned that we were not reaching a number of survivors because they were not comfortable appearing at public hearings. As a result we set up toll-free hotlines for public constituents to anonymously call in.

One night we received a call from a 65-year-old woman from Massachusetts, who was

the wife of a prominent politician. She was hiding in a closet with the door shut, finally – but cautiously -- ready to tell her story for the very first time.

She described the harrowing abuse at the hands of her husband since the beginning of their marriage. Forty-five years later, this was the first time she felt could tell someone and had a way of telling someone.

The reasons she didn't leave are not unknown to those of us who work with survivors: she was afraid no one would believe her, she didn't know where to go, and she was financially dependent on her husband.

This woman, at 65 years, with children and a family, felt completely alone. And in 1995, we didn't have a name for what this was and we were far from knowing how to respond.

That is, until the survivors began to speak up and speak out.

As you know, elder abuse victims face unique obstacles in getting the help and services they need and deserve.

Age or disability may increase the isolation of older individuals. Victims may refrain from seeking help or calling the police due to shame or embarrassment, because the abuse was committed by an adult child or grandchild, spouse, friend or caregiver. Sometimes it had gone on for years and even decades.

Myths about sexual assault –that only young women are raped, for example--coupled with a failure to see older individuals as sexual beings, can prevent medical and other professionals from recognizing indicators of sexual assault when they are dealing with older victims.

An appropriate and comprehensive response to older victims must take into account the unique challenges these victims face and improve systemic responses to older victims.

This is what our work is about, and this is why we are here today.

A multidisciplinary approach is critical in addressing cases of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation because of the complexities involved in these cases.

Through the Abuse in Later Life Program, OVW has provided over \$26 million in funding to 78 communities throughout the nation since 2002.

In addition to funding victim services, our office funds technical assistance providers, such as the National District Attorney's Association, who in partnership with the National Center for Abuse in Later Life produced the national training video you will hear about later.

Our office works closely with the Administration on Aging and other federal agencies, as a member of the Federal Elder Justice Working Group, which brings together officials

responsible for carrying out elder justice activities throughout the federal government.

While we have made significant changes in our nation's response to this crime, we still have much more to do.

During my term as Director of the Office on Violence Against Women I want to focus on public outreach. I want everyone, not just those of us in the field, to know the issue, to care about it, to do something about it. I want every individual and organization to own it.

I want to discover what makes people take action and what we need to do to change the culture that seemingly tolerates it, or worse, condones it. If we don't take action when we can, when we don't challenge myths, when we turn a blind eye to the statistics and a deaf ear to the cries for help, then we, each of us, is condoning abuse of the elderly, for we are complicit in its perpetuation. And this is inexcusable, and intolerable.

My overarching goal is to broaden and deepen the pool we serve. We need to ask ourselves: Who are we not reaching? And, of those who we are, how could we be serving their needs better?

Most importantly, I want us to approach all the work we do qualitatively as well as quantitatively – beyond the numbers, are we changing lives the way we want to? Are our programs making a difference? Are we reaching as many as we'd like to, and if the answer is no, then how can we do the work better?

Today we will hear from a number of organizations and individuals who are making that difference. And the Office on Violence Against Women is honored and proud to feature their work here today.

Thank you again to everyone for being here, for taking that step to recognize the critical and progressive work that is being done around this issue, as we hear from our presenters this afternoon.