

Bandana Project to Spotlight Sexual Exploitation of Farmworker Women

Written by Robert ID4232

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In a partnership between the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and community groups, universities and other organizations; residents of more than 40 cities across the country will take a stand against the sexual harassment and abuse of farm worker women on April 3 as part of the "Bandana Project".

The SPLC and partners in these cities will invite members of the farm worker community and others to decorate bandanas that will be displayed in museums, community centers and schools as a symbolic gesture to raise awareness of the sexual exploitation of these vulnerable women.

The project has adopted the bandana as a symbol of solidarity to end this abuse because many farm worker women use bandanas on the job to cover their faces and bodies in an attempt to ward off unwanted sexual attention that often leads to rape.

The exhibits will be launched on April 3, the national day of action for Sexual Assault Awareness Month. This year's theme is sexual assault in the workplace. Exhibits will be on display throughout the month of April.

The problem has received little public attention but is well-known to farm worker women, many of whom remain silent about sexual exploitation on the job. William R. Tamayo, regional attorney for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in San Francisco, wrote in a 2000 report that "the sexual harassment of farm worker women is a widespread problem." In an earlier survey of farmworker women in California, 90 percent of the women questioned said that sexual harassment was a major problem on the job.

"Often in these precarious situations, farm worker women are ashamed for themselves and their families and afraid of losing their jobs," said Monica Ramirez, project director for Esperanza: The Immigrant Women's Legal Initiative of the SPLC. "Through this project, we try to bring a sense of hope, confidence and the will to be brave. It is our wish that these women will see our encouragement as a sign that they no longer have to suffer in silence."

Partnering organizations include: Alianza de Mujeres Activas, California Rural Legal Assistance, California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, Dolores Huerta Foundation, The Farmworker

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Women's Institute of the Farmworker Legal Services of New York, Inc., Lideres Campesinas, Loyola University Chicago's Gannon Scholars Program, National Sexual Violence Resource Center, Oregon Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force, Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Purdue University Latino Cultural Center, Purdue Latino Faculty and Staff Association, Purdue University's CARE: Communities Against Rape Initiative, Redlands Christian Migrant Association, Southeast Georgia Communities Project and Victim Rights Law Center.

"With the help of our partners around the country, we will shed light on this serious problem," Guerrero said. "It is our goal to send the message to workplace abusers that we will fight to stop the abuse of farmworker women, because no one should be forced to give up their dignity in order to feed their family."

The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit civil rights organization that combats bigotry and discrimination through litigation, education and advocacy. For more information, visit <http://www.splcenter.org>