



The 2008 Voices of Courage Honorees

Ending Violence Against Refugee Women and Girls

Kulah Borbor

Kulah Borbor is a survivor. When rebels attacked her village in 1991, every woman and girl was brutally raped, including her mother. Kulah herself was saved because, on the advice of her brother, she had cut her hair and was wearing trousers.

That day was life-changing and motivated Kulah to dedicate her life to fighting violence against women and helping women and girls deal with its effects. For the past 16 years, Kulah has been living in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, with thousands of fellow internally displaced people. For three years she has been working with the International Rescue Committee as a peer educator, raising awareness and mobilizing communities to stand up against violence against women and girls. Much of her work is trying to stop the practice of female genital mutilation, common in Liberia.



Kulah organized the West Point Women's Action Group to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. The group is currently working toward becoming independent from the IRC. Kulah also initiated the establishment of an adult literacy school in West Point, which she herself is now attending—learning, at the age of 42, to read and write.



Gistam Sakaeva

Gistam Sakaeva is a pioneer in fighting violence against women in Chechnya, helping survivors find safety and rebuild their lives. She and her family were displaced repeatedly during the two devastating Russian-Chechen wars, which began in 1994. During the wars, women and girls were raped, sexually abused, killed and forcibly separated from their families. Today, in the aftermath of the conflict, women and girls are vulnerable to forced marriage and child marriages, domestic violence, and lack of access to reproductive health care, education and economic security.

As a refugee, Gistam started working with international humanitarian organizations, with a focus on vulnerable women. In 2005, back in Chechnya, she started volunteering with Doveriye (Reliance), a local organization helping disabled children. There she met mothers who were being abused by their husbands and parents-in-law. At Gistam's initiative, Doveriye became the first local partner of the international organization Care. Doveriye has become the first, and to date only, local organization in Chechnya that fights violence against women and helps survivors. Gistam's most courageous initiative is working with perpetrators of violence against women, who are serving jail time, most of them for "honor killings." The organization also works to raise awareness and change harmful attitudes in the general population and offers a range of trainings to empower women.

Shreen Abdul Saroor

Shreen Abdul Saroor has lived her whole life knowing nothing but the civil strife that has torn Sri Lanka apart. In 1990, she and her family were forced to flee Mannar island in a small boat when Tamil militants forced the Muslim inhabitants to leave.

In 1997, Shreen co-founded the Mannar Women's Development Foundation to help Muslim and Tamil women displaced by violence. She also founded the Mannar Resettlement Project, an initiative to resettle a mixed group of Tamil and Muslim internally displaced families in their native district. More recently, when ceasefire was falling apart in Sri Lanka and abuses against the civilian population, particularly women, were on the rise, Shreen founded Mannar Women for Human Rights and Democracy, a women's committee that seeks to bring international attention to gender-based violence in the war-torn areas of the north and east, where hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people live. The organization investigates and documents gross violations of human rights, and works with international bodies to highlight these abuses and demand accountability.



Shreen's innovative and courageous efforts offer alternatives to restore human dignity and end violence against refugee and internally displaced women and girls.

Visit www.womenscommission.org/voices/08.php to learn more about the 2008 Voices of Courage Awards Luncheon.