



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**The Advocates of Human Rights Focusing World Leaders on Violence Against Women**

*Minneapolis-based organization at Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly being held in Ecuador*

Minneapolis, MN—03/22/13—The Advocates for Human Rights, a Minneapolis-based organization, is focusing the attention of world leaders, gathering for the 128<sup>th</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly, on violence against women. The Assembly is being held March 22-27 in Quito, Ecuador.

“It is estimated that, worldwide, one in five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime, and this form of violence is magnified in countries prone to conflict,” according to the Union. “Violence against women is a scourge that spares no country, and this human rights violation is one of the most common throughout the world.”

In a number of countries, rape committed in an intimate relationship or marriage is not criminalized, and certain countries even allow rapists to be exonerated from their crime by marrying their victim, the organization reports.

At the invitation of the Union’s Secretary General, Anders Johnson, The Advocates’ Cheryl Thomas, director of the organization’s women’s program, will present the elements of a strong sexual assault law. Thomas will detail what the elements should entail, starting with a definition of rape and sexual assault that does not frame them as crimes of morality or of honor, or against the family. Parliamentarians will debate the challenges and strategic directions needed to strengthen legislation and policies aimed at combating violence against women, in particular sexual violence.

Many parliaments have made the issue a political priority and are enacting laws to prevent and abolish the most common forms of violence and to protect and assist victims. While almost all countries criminalize rape, penal codes often define sexual violence very narrowly, with many still framing the problem in terms of indecency or immorality, or as a crime against the family or society, rather than a violation of an individual’s bodily integrity, reports the Union.

The Advocates for Human Rights’ women’s program applies international human rights standards to advocate for women’s rights in the United States and around the world. With 20 years of experience, the program works with partners in other countries and at home to end violence against women, documenting gaps in government response to violence against women and assisting in making improvement to laws, policies, and practices. The United Nations refers to The Advocates as the “go-to” organization for domestic violence legal reform.

**For more information, please contact:**

Cheryl Thomas  
Director, Women’s Human Rights Program  
cthomas@advrights.org  
Thomas is unavailable by phone while in Ecuador.

Mary O’Brien  
Associate, Women’s Human Rights Program  
(612) 746-4682  
mobrien@advrights.org

###

Celebrating 30 years of working for dignity and justice, The Advocates for Human Rights, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Minneapolis, is dedicated to the promotion of internationally-recognized human rights. To learn more visit [theadvocatesforhumanrights.org](http://theadvocatesforhumanrights.org).