

#16to365 Days of Activism to End Gender Based Violence

Background

Ending GBV in our lifetimes will require dismantling the ingrained and intersecting systems, laws, norms, and practices that oppress women, girls, and gender-diverse people. Women’s and feminist gender justice organizations and movements have always been at the forefront of this work, acting in solidarity across local, national, regional, and international contexts.

In 2024, the City University of New York Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy (CUNY SPH) began hosting the Global 16 Days Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign that had been [initiated and hosted](#) by the Center for Women’s Global Leadership at Rutgers University. For over thirty years, this civil society-led campaign has brought together local and global feminist activists and movements to raise awareness of the many forms of gender-based violence, its root causes and impact, and pathways to prevention and accountability. Historically the campaign has run for 16 days, from International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25) to Human Rights Day (December 10).

The [campaign](#) is housed at the [Sexual & Reproductive Justice Hub \(SRJ Hub\)](#) at CUNY SPH, which coordinates solutions-oriented scholarship, training, and advocacy, centering the lived experiences of women of color and funding their and other marginalized people’s work. We draw on our experience as part of the United States’ largest, oldest, and most diverse urban public university system, with faculty, staff, and students connected to communities and populations around the world.

The Campaign in 2024

From 16 to 365 Days of Activism to End Gender-based Violence

Under CUNY SPH, the campaign will transition into a year-round initiative with a greater emphasis on grassroots organizing, reflecting the 365-days-a-year work of feminist activists to shift norms,



secure accountability, and transform power structures that oppress women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

This campaign framework is shaped by the insights activists shared with us about their needs from the campaign, both in its approach and in selecting this year's theme of bodily autonomy. We see the campaign as an iterative, collaborative process and look forward to your feedback and suggestions for improvements to make it more useful to organizers everywhere.

Equality remains out of reach for far too many women, girls, and gender-diverse people across the globe. Meanwhile, some previously enshrined protections have been rolled back, weakening a foundation of progress and risking a return to restrictions that deepen marginalization and limit agency. A new level of sexism, misogyny, and misogynoir, toward women's decision-making authority requires urgent action. Some of the urgent trends affecting bodily autonomy include:

- Femicide and restrictions on abortion access¹
- LGBTQI+ people, particularly trans, experiencing exclusion and marginalization including familial rejection, denial to opportunities of employment and education, and reduced access to basic needs such as permanent shelter, identity affirming and respectful healthcare²
- Increased gender inequality caused directly by crowding out social expenditures and indirectly by sustaining gender norms that reinforce women's subordinate status in society, like militarization³
 - Economic Debt and Crises as structural violences that deepen Intimate Partner Violence and further marginalize those in the non-hegemonic minority
 - Austerity measures that enables significant cuts in the budget for access to health and education deepening inequalities and social hierarchies
 - Corruption, which disproportionately impacts marginalized identities and communities and affects access to services, justice, resources and opportunities, and physical safety.⁴
- Conflict and occupation in blatant disregard of international law⁵

¹ [United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures. Women's Autonomy, Equality and Reproductive Health in International Human Rights: Between Recognition, Backlash and Regressive Trends. \(October 2017\)](#)

² [United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. The Struggle of Trans and Gender-Diverse Persons: An Independent Study on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. \(undated, accessed September 24, 2024\)](#)

³ [UN Women. The Impact of Militarization on Gender Inequality. \(May 2022\)](#)

⁴ [Transparency International. Breaking the silence about sextortion: The Links between Power, Sex, and Corruption \(2020\)](#)

⁵ [United Nations Security Council. Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General. S/2024/671. 24 September 2024.](#)

- Growing number and scale of climate events contributes to GBV, and weak or nonexistent international legal frameworks for addressing climate driven GBV⁶
- Lack of visibility within the actions to end GBV of the impact on men of patriarchal practices that validate or attack masculinities, perpetuating a binary narrative.

With the pervasiveness and increasing risks to women, we must expand our focus to cover all issues of bodily autonomy.

To build a comprehensive approach, the campaign seeks active engagement with grassroots organizers across diverse regions. Interviews with organizers from South Asia, North Africa, Latin America, the Balkans and Central Asia have illuminated both universal themes and unique local challenges. These perspectives are complemented by insights from the campaign's Advisory Council, composed of scholars and activists with deep experience in feminist organizing for gender, economic, racial, reproductive, and environmental justice.

This engagement is essential for tailoring campaign messaging and support, especially in critical political and social moments, and underscores the campaign's role in promoting human dignity in diverse contexts.

Recognizing the diversity of challenges faced by local organizers, the campaign will offer messages, illustrations, and content resources that can be used as is or easily modified. This flexible approach helps grassroots movements use campaign resources in ways that resonate locally, enhancing their impact during pivotal moments. By avoiding a uniform, standardized approach, the campaign enables local partners to adapt materials according to their unique needs, prioritizing authenticity and safety in local activism.

Grassroots organizers have recommended extending the campaign beyond the traditional 16 days, and potentially evolving it into a multi-year initiative—an approach earlier piloted in the 2018-2019 campaign in support of adoption of ILO Convention 190, on the world of work. Traditionally, the 16 Days of Activism has centered on international days of observance such as the International Day to End GBV, the International Day to Respond to HIV, and Human Rights Day. This concentrated timeframe suits UN agencies, governments, and media since they can focus on specific social issues to make commitments, policy changes, and thematic in-depth articles. However, community organizers work year-round to end gender-based violence and to protect bodily autonomy for all.

Extending the campaign would allow for more nuanced messaging around bodily autonomy that can adapt to changing contexts and amplify ongoing local efforts. A sustained initiative would also better respond to region-specific needs, maintain momentum, and create a lasting impact over time.

⁶ [Van Dalaan, Kim Robin et. al. Extreme events and gender-based violence: a mixed-methods systematic review - The Lancet Planetary Health, Volume 6, Issue 6, e504-e523](#); and [Desai, B.H. and Mandal, M., Role of Climate Change in Exacerbating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Women: A New Challenge for International Law Environmental Policy and Law 51 \(2021\) 137–157, DOI 10.3233/EPL-210055](#).

One of the main reasons to have a global campaign is to build solidarity among grassroots organizers and survivors who may face different challenges and opportunities than more mainstream groups. Knowing an international community exists with shared challenges—such as anti-gender movements and violence against women, the LGBTQI+ community, and other marginalized groups—creates opportunities for cross-regional solidarity. By facilitating collaboration among grassroots organizers worldwide, the campaign can help unite movements against systemic oppression, amplify local voices on a global scale, and cultivate a network of support among communities facing similar challenges.

In response to feedback from organizers, the campaign will prioritize diverse visual representation across its materials, featuring varied abilities, skin tones, and LGBTQI+ expressions. This approach counters exclusionary narratives within the movement, promoting a broad, intersectional view of bodily autonomy that resonates with marginalized groups and allies alike.

One request organizers made that we have not been able to fulfill is providing funding for local events or strategic resources for organizers in restrictive environments. While such support strongly aligns with the campaign's commitment to making a tangible difference on the ground, currently, we don't have the resources or mechanisms to provide that funding. We will continue to encourage feminist funders to support organizers' requests for multi-year, trust-based core funding that advance their efforts to promote bodily autonomy and end gender-based violence.

Bodily Autonomy: A Preliminary Framing

Autonomy refers to an individual's ability to exercise free will, creating personal rules based on their life experiences. In collective life, we establish norms or rules that strive for peaceful coexistence, often within a heteronormative framework. However, these norms interact with the personal rules that each individual establishes for themselves.

Autonomy is linked to freedom, and in order to exercise freedom, we must live in environments that offer diverse options and opportunities, allowing us to make choices, filtered through our personal lens.

We define bodily autonomy as the freedom to express every thought, feeling, need, and desire through our bodies, each uniquely shaping who we are. It is the power to make choices about our physical selves in every dimension. Bodily autonomy is the most direct expression of personal freedom, as we experience and construct our identities through our embodied interactions. It is how we freely live, connect, and relate to others in society.

The campaign emphasizes bodily autonomy as the power and right to experience pleasure, self-expression, and self-determination—living and narrating one's story through the body. Respect for bodily autonomy is often in tension with societal norms that are embedded in regulatory

frameworks and oppressive cultural traditions and practices that use stereotypes, violence, stigma, and discrimination to limit our personal agency and even dictate the place we should occupy in society, thus reinforcing marginalization.

Grassroots organizers emphasize that bodily autonomy is deeply connected to broader values such as sovereignty, liberation, and self-determination, and intersects with a wide array of issues from trans rights to violence to healthcare access. They also acknowledge that economic and political barriers—like austerity and inflation—impede access to health and essential needs, particularly for marginalized groups, hindering bodily autonomy.

Organizers are encouraged to use campaign materials to spotlight these challenges, bridging the gap between individual bodily autonomy and the structural roots of inequality. By promoting flexibility and nuance in strategies and messages, the campaign unites social justice movements under a shared vision.

This campaign seeks to bridge the gap between individual autonomy and systemic inequality, advocating for bodily autonomy as essential to a just, inclusive society. By focusing on this right, we support individual agency while advancing gender equality and human rights universally. A global conversation promoting bodily autonomy is vital for creating an enabling environment where individuals have freedom and agency.

Campaign Principles

A word cloud of campaign principles. The words are arranged in a roughly rectangular shape, with varying font sizes and colors. The colors used are green, purple, red, black, and blue. The words include: FREEDOM, DIVERSITY, Positivity, Respect, Compassion, GRASSROOTS ORGANIZERS LEAD THE WAY, Girls' rights are Human Rights, COLLECTIVE CARE, Women's Rights are Human Rights, Intersectionality, Bravery, AGENCY, FOCUS ON THE MAJORITY OF THE WORLD, Trans Rights are Human Rights, Sex Work is Work, Self-determination, and Community-Centered.

Campaign Goal

The 2024 campaign amplifies the efforts of feminist grassroots groups to resist and counter the impacts of gender based violence by framing bodily autonomy as a fundamental human right. The campaign emphasizes bodily autonomy as the power and right to experience pleasure, self-expression, and self-determination—living and narrating one's story through the body. By promoting flexibility and nuance in strategies and messaging, the campaign unites social justice movements under a shared vision.

Target Audiences and Tone

We understand that organizers live and work in contexts with varying degrees of openness and safety, and that their advocacy strategies must be responsive to shifting opportunities and challenges. With this in mind, we are suggesting messages that we hope will resonate in their specific contexts, communities, and target audiences.

The 2024 Campaign adopts a friendly and approachable tone with clear, direct, and relaxed messages. We start from the assumption that everyone wants to create and live in an environment that enables all of us to reach our full potential and enjoy wellbeing and happiness. We include prompts for personal reflection to foster understanding and social support, and questions to trigger empathy, spark solutions, and encourage compassion.

Adaptable Messages

Since Bodily Autonomy is an umbrella term that has many branches, we have articulated sample messages in a spreadsheet. The spreadsheet shows common societal obstacles to bodily autonomy, how they present in daily life, and then offers layered messages that can be used or adapted. We give guidance on whether each message is more likely to succeed with a basic, intermediate, or open audience; and whether each message aims to share information, spark an emotion or reflection, offer a practical tool, or drive engagement.

We aim to spark personal reflections and build community while at the same time increasing understanding of the underlying causes of inequalities and marginalization.

The first group of messages refer to the definition of bodily autonomy itself as an introduction of the scope for this year's campaign:

Hetero-Cisgender Norms and Social Hierarchies are clear obstacles to making human rights and equality a reality, but also how they enable gender-based violence. By framing messages from those aspects, we acknowledge the intersection of various forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, ableism, and colonialism. This reflects an understanding that social inequalities are interconnected and must be addressed simultaneously.

One of the first aspects related to context in the campaign are the strategies and beliefs that feed physical and direct/obvious forms of gender-based violence-such as femicide, rape and sexual harrasment. **Dehumanization** is a tool used by oppressors to justify or diminish relevance to terrible acts of violences against a group or community, in this case women, girls and members of the LGBTQI+ community. It stems from an underlying belief that these groups belong to and serve cis-gender men, therefore making prevention and care for its victims a very challenging task for activists.

Secondly we explore the **stereotypes, prejudices, stigma, and discrimination related to sexuality** since it is the close relationship between the exercise of body autonomy and sexuality that leads oppressors to focus their greatest efforts on sexuality.

And thirdly, our messages address hegemonic **beauty standards** as these are also a mischievous way that we integrate shame and neglect towards our own body and our need to express emotions and identity through it. In this way we all become reproducers of oppression perpetuating feelings of guilt, embarrassment and devaluation in us and in others around us.

We invite you to explore the campaign's Message Tree if you want to go deeper into our process, or proceed directly to the campaign's Proposed Messages to start creating your own images combining them with the templates and illustrations.

These messages are a starting point, not a prescription. We hope the campaign will grow larger and better with the inputs from the diverse communities we expect to interact with it. We include templates organizers can use to raise awareness based on data from their context and their own political analysis of what the community needs and what they want to display around GBV and bodily autonomy.

Where Does the Campaign Live?

This campaign comes to life when it is used by activists around the globe without any branding from a specific host or partner, in keeping with the spirit of the Global Campaign as a community driven strategy. We invite any host or partner using these materials to add their own logos when they post on their platforms. We envision two formats for the campaign:

Online

- Through social media channels from organizations, social enterprises, media, universities, and individuals that care about GBV and bodily autonomy. The campaign has the templates as a visual identifier for the campaign's images on social media and by using #16to365 as a hashtag we hope to create a global conversation that extends year round.
- With the launch of the campaign and through the lists of people that have participated in previous campaigns we invite organizers to request access to the campaign toolbox and ask if they want to become partners of the campaign through an [online form](#).
- A set of ready to use templates with illustrations and messages in multiple languages will live on the CUNY SPH SRJ Hub's microsite, and will be posted to SRJ Hub channels.
- The campaign has its own social media channels that will have images created from the proposed messages, provided templates, and illustrations using the #16to365 hashtag.

Offline

- We have suggestions for how to print some of the images that can be created for offline activities, printing in postcard and tabloid sizes. If community organizers have marches and in-person activities planned throughout the 16 days and beyond, they are free to use the material provided if they find it useful for their social mobilization.

Join us, follow us, tag us and use #16to365

[Fill in the form](#) to join the campaign:



The campaign is on Instagram, 'X' and TikTok as **@365toEndGBV**

Use **#16to365** to engage with the Global Campaign